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ABSTRACT

The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), supported by the Ford Foundation, sought to energize distressed rural communities and the local colleges that serve them. Through a structured process of guided intervention, 24 colleges and their communities learned how to build new partnerships, adapt new ideas to local needs, and implement collaborative college/community projects. This publication documents the RCCI program and process in four parts: (1) Background, which presents the origins of RCCI and the conceptual framework and study design; (2) The Initiative and its Context, which details the program as it was applied in individual colleges and communities; (3) Findings from the Assessment, which assesses whether or not RCCI achieved its main goals; and (4) Conclusion, which summarizes the program findings. The findings of the study indicate that RCCI succeeded in providing a framework for these communities to move forward, although there was not enough time for RCCI to strongly affect policy changes that address power imbalances in the community. RCCI did take small steps in the confidence-building process that would lead to more engaged institutions and more substantive changes in emerging leaders. (Contains 21 references, 11 tables, and 14 figures.) (NB)

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Opportunities in Place:

National Assessment of the Rural Community College Initiative

A National Demonstration Funded by the Ford Foundation

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Jane McEldowney Jensen
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Rural Community College Initiative

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Opportunities in Place: National Assessment of the Rural Community College Initiative

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RCCI
Rural Community College Initiative

A national demonstration funded by the Ford Foundation

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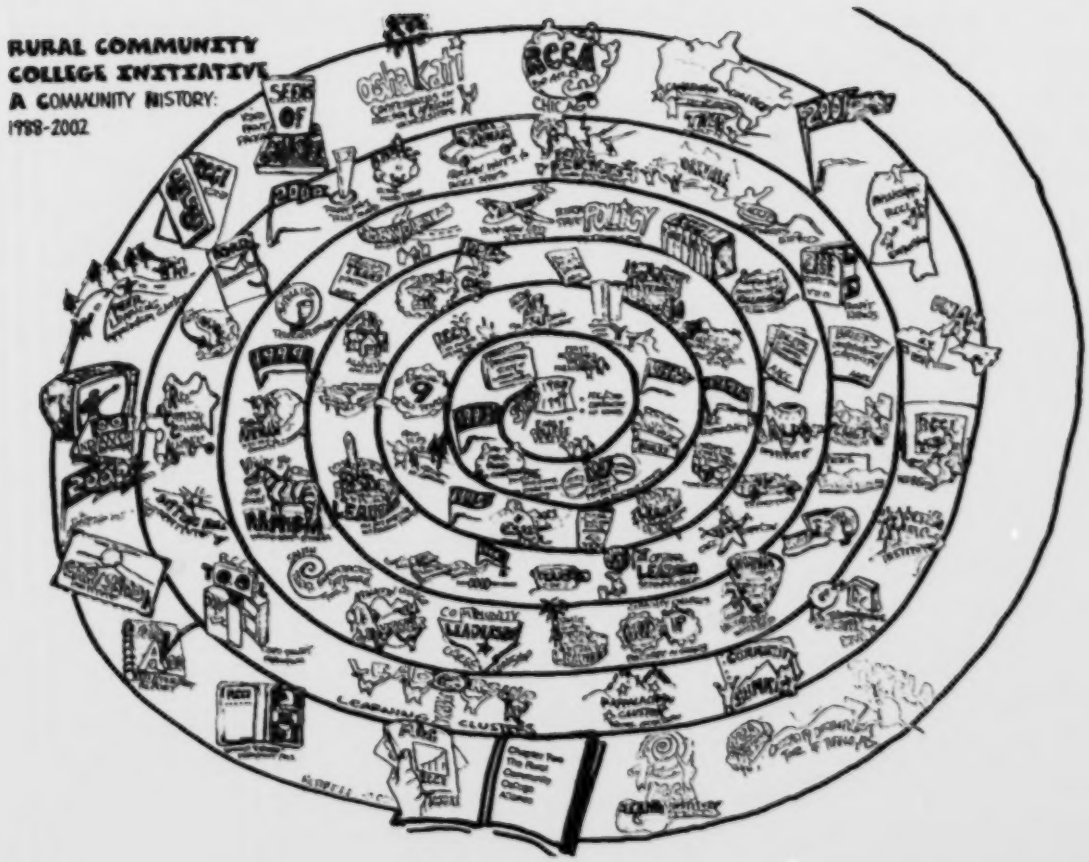

Illustration: Rural Community College Initiative: A Community History, 1988-2002, by Ken Hubbell

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Preface

The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), supported by The Ford Foundation, sought to energize distressed rural communities and the local colleges that serve them. Focusing on change and capacity, RCCI was unusual in that it was a place-based initiative. It aimed to make place and culture count while stemming the tide of rural out-migration and rural decline. RCCI's philanthropic supporters and program managers challenged college and community teams to build on their own assets and culture to improve regional economies and access to education.

Through a structured process of guided intervention, 24 colleges and their communities learned how to change, how to see themselves differently, how to build new partnerships, how to adapt new ideas to local needs, and how to implement collaborative college/community projects. RCCI stimulated many impressive projects designed to increase access to higher education and to expand opportunities for economic development, but it was the learning process itself that generated the greatest change. As a result of that process, the colleges enhanced their own institutional capacity by changing institutional cultures, leveraging resources, and developing new leaders. Over time, the college definitions of access and economic development broadened as they were pressed to think creatively, widen their leadership base, and develop deeper collaborations across their communities. With an expanded view of access and economic development, these colleges redefined their goals as educational institutions—and looked holistically at the relationship between the education and training of individuals and the development of wealth and well-being in their community.

RCCI pressed colleges to think of access as more than the traditional community college open door. They began including a range of personal development activities to reach people previously not served by traditional programs—empowering individuals to take larger roles in their communities. RCCI helped nurture an environment of creativity and change on participating campuses that contributed to growth and institutional expansion. RCCI also helped community colleges acknowledge the relationship between their mission and the well-being of their local economy, the link between individual opportunity and community success. It broadened the definition of economic development to include a range of activities that evolved over time with changing local needs, all in keeping with area values and culture, and the retention of wealth in the community.

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As the evidence from this assessment indicates, RCCI was a successful demonstration of the capacity of communities, with support and assistance, to find their own solutions to community challenges. After initial uncertainty about goals, roles, and expectations, the RCCI colleges discovered the value of flexibility, change, collaboration, and learning from one another. Shared commitments and values overcame institutional differences and created a learning culture that the participants identified as "the RCCI process."

Central to this process were the strategic intervention strategies of a third-party manager that prodded the colleges to take risks and provided a supportive environment for learning at all levels. By facilitating cross-cultural learning, valuing local cultures and traditions, and providing flexible funding for locally defined projects, RCCI avoided the one-size-fits-all, hierarchical strategies that have historically characterized national rural programs. While the national network raised expectations and created healthy competition, each college was allowed to begin at its own starting point, taking into account its own history, culture, attitudes, and awareness of possibilities. RCCI helped a college find its own spot on the continuum and move forward.

RCCI became a generator of institutional change, affecting college organizational structures, leadership styles, and cultures. The deeper and more lasting impact of RCCI reaches beyond individual projects to its power to energize people for change. Above all, RCCI nurtured a vision of new possibilities and provided a web of experiences that encouraged confidence, creativity, and community while acknowledging the value of place.

The assessment team is grateful to the Ford Foundation for investing in rural America; to the members of the RCCI National Advisory Panel for their reality checks; to the staff and coaches affiliated with MDC, Inc., for their willingness to share information and ideas; and especially to all the RCCI colleges for hosting site visits and responding to interviews and surveys, for their lessons about the value of place, and for their generosity of spirit.

PART I. Background

Chapter 1. Introduction

In 1994, the Ford Foundation launched a national demonstration project intended to help community colleges in distressed regions of rural America move their people toward prosperity. The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), as it was called, would eventually involve in its demonstration phase 24 community and tribal colleges in four persistently poor regions of the country. It would have educational access and economic development goals that in retrospect seem breathtakingly ambitious. It would involve multiple strategies, media, and partners, including MDC, Inc., in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, as a third-party manager. It would attract attention from around the United States, Canada, and as far away as Namibia. Participants reported that they had been "converted" to the "RCCI way."

To some extent, RCCI presaged a larger national movement focused on encouraging institutions of higher education to adapt to changing societal needs, especially in their own communities. Community colleges had always had a "community" mission and liked to say "community is our middle name," and that was surely true of tribal colleges. Community building had been the focus of a Kellogg Foundation-supported Beacon College project, managed by the American Association of Community Colleges, from 1989 to 1995. The Beacon project grew from a report by the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges called *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century.* The report's tag line became this:

> *"The term community should be defined not only as a region to be served, but also as a climate to be created."*[1]

A variety of "communities" were created in the Beacon College project. Many colleges developed rather sophisticated programs to address challenges in the classrooms, colleges, and communities through school and workforce partnerships, and through service learning. In the end, more than 250 colleges participated. Although some rural colleges were among them, few, if any, were located in economically distressed parts of areas. The RCCI demonstration,

[1] *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century. A Report of the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges,* American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1988, page 3.

beginning just as the Beacon project was ending, was a pioneer effort in severely distressed and isolated rural communities. Through RCCI, the Ford Foundation stretched the notion of community even further.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s there was more interest in ways that colleges could engage communities in broader ways, including business partnerships and service learning. The higher education role in meeting social needs was becoming more prominent at the national level. For example, in its report *Leadership Reconsidered: Engaging Higher Education in Social Change*, the American Council on Education laid out a framework for transformative leadership guided by collaboration and shared purpose,[2] both principles that were critical to RCCI's core strategic planning process. In its report, *The Knowledge Net: Connecting Communities, Learners, and Colleges*, the American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees urged community colleges to connect with their communities in multiple ways. The report's recommendations included these:

> *Community colleges should use their widespread community prominence and accessibility to help forge positive relationships among diverse segments of society. Community colleges should assess their community's needs and assets and implement appropriate programs to cultivate and enhance current and future community leaders…*[3]

Community colleges, argued the authors of *The Knowledge Net*, have the potential to convene people with differing viewpoints, develop local leadership, and "help cultivate habits and attitudes for active citizenship."[4]

Several years before these reports were published, RCCI took on exactly these tasks. The initiative's demonstration phase officially ended in early 2002, when the Ford Foundation announced its intent to institutionalize the initiative within the land grant university system. Also in early 2002, two Regional Rural Development Centers (one at Iowa State University and the other at Mississippi State University) began a new and promising phase in the life of the initiative. At the same time, RCCI presidents launched the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA)—a membership organization that aims to preserve the RCCI learning network and provide a national voice specifically for America's rural community colleges.

This report presents findings from an assessment of RCCI's demonstration phase

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[2] American Council on Education, with support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2000, http://www.wkkf.org/pubs/CCT/Leadership/Pub3368.pdf.

[3] American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees, with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2000, http://www.theknowledgenet.org/know-net.pdf.

[4] *The Knowledge Net*, page 5.

conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges. The assessment involved focus groups, field observation, structured interviews, case studies of 16 of the 24 colleges, and analysis of documents and quantitative data. (See Chapter 4 for details on the assessment method.)

The intent of this report is to share what has been learned from an important and well-funded initiative. The findings have implications for colleges, universities, and communities that are committed to RCCI's dual goals of educational access and economic development. The lessons are relevant in general to rural colleges that are located in disadvantaged areas, but they are particularly relevant for colleges participating in RCCI's next phase, either as members of the RCCA or in partnership with the Regional Rural Development Centers.

The following chapters provide background on the origins of RCCI and its conceptual framework, and on the method used to assess the initiative. They describe the original 24 colleges and their home communities as context for RCCI. After an explanation of RCCI's various components and what it looked like on the ground, the report presents findings lessons from the assessment and their implications for future work.

Chapter 2. Origins of RCCI

RCCI grew out of the difficult economic circumstances in which many parts of rural America found themselves in the 1980s. On the whole, rural employment and population were growing more slowly than in cities, earnings per job and education levels were lower, and by the mid-1980s, the rural poverty rate was almost 50 percent higher than the rate for metropolitan areas. Several factors were responsible for the increasing disparities between rural and urban America: job losses in industries on which rural communities had traditionally depended, declining demand for natural resource commodities, and decreasing public investments.[5]

In this economic context of the late 1980s, Ford Foundation president Susan Berresford and MDC, Inc., president George Autry began discussing the idea of investing in community colleges to encourage economic growth in poor rural places. Their conversations eventually expanded to include Betsy Campbell and Walt Coward of the Foundation's Rural Poverty and Resources Division and Steve Zwerling of its Education and Culture Division. Autry was convinced that one of the underlying causes of rural poverty was the long history of under-investment in human resources. Building on the influential MDC study of disparities in the southern economy, *Shadows in the Sunbelt,* Autry recommended investing in workforce training and increasing access to higher education in rural areas. He believed that community colleges were the natural community-based institutions to lead such efforts.

Drawing on their experiences with urban community colleges, Foundation staff believed that rural colleges also had the potential to serve as catalysts for economic development, but they questioned the capacity of many rural institutions to function as vehicles of change. The colleges in distressed communities had little experience in community development, had traditionally functioned mainly as academic transfer institutions, and were burdened by inadequate resources.

To begin, the Foundation commissioned a planning study by Eldon Miller, then president of West Virginia University at Parkersburg. The purpose was to explore

[5] For more discussion of the economic context for RCCI, see William A. Galston and Karen J. Baehler in *Rural Development in the United States: Connecting Theory, Practice, and Possibilities*, Island Press, 1995.

the potential of community colleges to accomplish two objectives:

- to contribute to community and regional development; and
- to assume greater leadership in promoting community linkages that can lead to community progress.

Miller wrote what became known as the "Parkersburg study." He focused on colleges in four regions of the country: Appalachia, the Lower Mississippi Valley, the Southwest, and tribal lands of Montana, South Dakota, and North Dakota. Through analysis of secondary and other data, he identified 85 community colleges that served 206 economically distressed rural counties in these four regions. Fifteen of the 24 colleges that eventually became RCCI participants were among the 85 identified in the study. The others were generally in somewhat more urban counties but still served poor communities.

Among the Parkersburg study's findings:

- Community colleges are well positioned to assist economically distressed rural counties (EDRC) in achieving their long-term development goals.
- Community colleges that serve EDRCs are challenged by factors of small size, isolation, and overwhelming community need. The colleges are typically small, with a median enrollment of about 1,900 students. Unable to benefit from economies of scale, they face high unit costs and have only limited resources to place at risk in developing and offering new programs. These data suggested the critical importance of these community colleges leveraging their limited resources through collaboration with the broadest possible range of community-based organizations, other agencies, and private sector enterprises.
- These colleges are frequently found at great distance from university centers and other resources, limiting their access to the most recent advances in rural economic development strategies.

The Parkersburg study recommendations included:

- The combination of low school and college graduation rates with high levels of unemployment and poverty strongly suggest the necessity of a two pronged strategy of interventions, in which initiatives to increase high school and college attendance must link with efforts to expand local capacity to offer employment.
- These colleges demonstrate a commitment to educational access and attainment, and they are well positioned to assume a leadership role

in promoting economic development through strategies like small business or micro-enterprise incubation.

- A major objective in any effort to strengthen the capacity of community colleges to serve economically distressed rural areas must rely on strategies that promote improved communication and collaboration within and across communities.

Clearly, the Parkersburg study identified in 1992 what were to become the two basic components of RCCI: economic development coupled with access to education, and partnerships to overcome rural isolation. Beyond these general parameters, there were no clear strategies for empowering community colleges to become catalysts for change. RCCI was to be an experiment in innovation and collaboration.

Following a series of meetings in 1993 with MDC and selected community college presidents, the Foundation announced the Rural Community College Initiative. It focused on communities in the four persistently poor regions that had already been identified: Appalachia, the Delta/South, Southwest, and Northern Plains. In the summer of 1994, Ford invited nine colleges to participate in RCCI's initial demonstration phase. They came to be known as the "pilots." In 1997, a new cohort consisting of 15 additional schools was added. They came to be known as the "expansions" and included colleges from the rural Southeast and an urban college that served people in poor communities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. Ford provided first planning grants and then implementation grants to each group of colleges, and MDC provide a range of technical assistance, professional development, and support services.

Ford Foundation president Susan Berresford explained RCCI this way:

> *"The RCCI represents a unique vision that focuses both on people and places—it helps struggling rural communities build a vital economy while also enhancing individual opportunity for people who live there."* [6]

[6] See MDC, Inc., Web site: http://www.mdcinc.org/rcci/

Chapter 3.
RCCI's Conceptual Framework

The original thinking behind RCCI was straightforward: In poor rural places, the community college is often a critical institution. With additional resources, it can make a big difference in the community.

Essentially, RCCI's aim was to bring colleges' community service and education roles closer together. One of the assumptions about rural development was that economic development and access to higher education are related. Without good jobs and a strong local economy, most high school and college graduates would continue to leave poor communities. Linking the access and development agendas could, it was hoped, reverse this trend and in turn promote stronger economic and community development.

That said, it is essential to remember that RCCI was conceived as a demonstration project and learning process. It quickly became a learning network. Staff from both Ford and MDC expected to refine and formalize their conceptual framework as the initiative evolved. As consultant Ron Eller of the University of Kentucky recalled, George Autry described RCCI as being "about the gift of time and resources to experiment and to test some things that we really didn't know about rural development." Inclusion of tribal colleges was important because, as Joe MacDonald, president of Salish Kootenai College, noted, there is "nothing more rural than a tribal college."

By May 1998, when the second cohort of colleges received their implementation grants, RCCI's conceptual framework had become well articulated. The second edition, *Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative,* was published. In 2002, Sarah Rubin of MDC wrote "Rural Colleges as Catalysts for Community Change: The RCCI Experience,"[7] which was widely distributed as part of a U.S. Department of Agriculture publication. Together these documents provide a useful picture of the RCCI's conceptual framework toward the end of its demonstration phase in 2002.

[7] In *Rural America* (Volume 16, Issue 2, Summer 2001), Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ruralamerica/ra162/.

RCCI was grounded in a philosophy consisting of five principles:

- Rural America matters.
- Healthy communities focus on their assets.
- Change begins with self-assessment.
- Effective change requires collaboration.
- Equity and high expectations should undergird education and economic development goals.

According to its conceptual framework,[8] RCCI's goals were to promote economic development and access to education, as summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

- **Economic development.** Within the context of the initiative's basic philosophy, economic development means "creating jobs, raising incomes, generating wealth and reinvesting that wealth in the region's businesses, institutions and people...and it means targeting economic opportunity to people who have been left out."[9] The most appropriate roles for community colleges in this arena generally involve:
  - mobilizing regional leadership
  - encouraging entrepreneurship and small business development.

- **Access.** Access "encompasses both access to the college and access through the college to expanded opportunities—including further education and productive, rewarding work."[10] Appropriate roles for community colleges to promote access are to:
  - build partnerships with secondary schools
  - help disadvantaged students achieve academic success, for example, by addressing family and community barriers to education and using culturally based curricula
  - offer nontraditional programs to meet the needs of nontraditional students
  - offer distance learning opportunities.

[8] See MDC, Inc., *Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative*, 1998, 2001.

[9] MDC, Inc., *Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative*, 2001, page 9.

[10] Ibid., page 14.

Table 1. Economic Development: Approaches for the Future

New economic realities in rural America demand new approaches to economic development. Rural development experts looking toward the next century urge communities to develop their human resources and a sound civic structure, to assist new and existing businesses, and above all to take a collaborative, regional approach to development.

Typical Past and Current Approaches	Approaches for the Future
Heavy dependence on natural resource base—agriculture, extraction, and timber.	Importance of intellectual, cultural, and civic resources for economic development.
Recruitment of industry, marketing cheap land,labor, and taxes.	Enhancing productivity and competitiveness of existing business and workers; help for new business start-ups. Strengthening the foundation for development, especially civic infrastructure.
Competition among adjacent towns and counties.	Regional approach that involves business and civic leaders across town and county lines.
Economic development priorities often set by one or two agencies, in a process dominated by established interests	Priorities emerge from collaborative process involving multiple agencies and organizations with broad-based community participation and support.
Focus on increasing the number of jobs.	Focus on raising the overall economic tide while also benefiting lower income, lower-wealth residents.

Source: MDC, Inc., *Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative, 2001, page 9.*

Table 2. Access to Education: Approaches for the Future

New economic realities in rural America demand an expanded definition of access.

Typical Past and Current Approaches	Approaches for the Future
"Open door" admissions.	Aggressive outreach to groups that need education and workforce preparation, including young high school dropouts, working and unemployed adults.
Enrollment as primary goal.	Multiple institutional goals that emphasize positive outcomes for students, including retention, graduation, and placement in further education and jobs. College helps each student achieve his or her individual goals.
Emphasis on credentials—awarding of degrees and certificates.	Emphasis on competencies—learning what one needs now, while keeping the door open for future learning—as well as graduation and certification.
Emphasis on teaching.	Emphasis on learning—student-centered, individualized approach.
Initial college relationship with students at age 18.	College relationship with middle and high schools to prepare more students for postsecondary education and raise the college-going rate in the region.
Enrollment of those who can travel to campus.	Extension of classes to people in remote areas and at worksites.
College isolated from other educational institutions.	Strong links with secondary schools and four-year colleges/universities.

Source: MDC, Inc., *Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative*, 2001, page 14.

Colleges must be strong institutions with stable funding and leadership to achieve RCCI's two goals of economic development and improved access. MDC and Ford often referred to this—the **institutional capacity**—as a third goal of the initiative. According to MDC:

> *To promote economic development and improve access for underserved populations, community colleges must have certain institutional capacities. They need to look inward, honing their ability to anticipate and respond to the needs of the people and communities they serve. They need to build partnerships with other organizations. And the college itself needs an institutional culture that supports innovation, risk-taking and learning.*[11]

[11] MDC, Inc., *Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative*, 1998, p14.

As described in the next chapter, AACC's assessment was designed to better understand how the assumptions underlying RCCI changed over time, whether the initiative achieved its goals, and why and under what circumstances it was successful.

Chapter 4. Study Design

Background

Assessment of the RCCI began in 1994 when the Ford Foundation engaged a team from the American Council on Education (ACE) to document and assess the work of the nine pilot colleges. Using a qualitative research strategy of site visits and interviews, researchers documented the colleges' planning and team development processes, ways the colleges were addressing the access question, and the beginnings of economic development initiatives at the nine sites. The ACE team presented a report of its findings to the Foundation in July 1996 as the conclusion of the first phase of RCCI assessment. The second phase began in July 1997 when the Foundation asked the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) to assume management of the RCCI documentation and assessment effort, using the same research team. The team moved beyond the baseline data collected previously and began looking more closely at specific programs and institutional strategies related to access, economic development, and partnership and team development implemented by the colleges. The fieldwork continued at the same nine sites, and AACC published the findings in four reports. [12]

In 1999, the Ford Foundation initiated the third phase by commissioning a new AACC research team to assess RCCI's impact on the colleges and their communities. The purpose was to examine the initiative as a whole rather than to evaluate success at individual colleges. The team conducted qualitative and quantitative aspects of the assessment over a 15-month period. Using a variety of methods, the researchers addressed six primary research questions (Table 3). Specific research methods are described below.

[12] See reports by Eller et al. (1998-1999). *Rural Community College Initiative. I. Access: Removing Barriers to Participation; Rural Community College Initiative. II. Economic Development; Rural Community College Initiative. III. Building Teams for Institutional and Community Change; and Rural Community College Initiative. IV. Capacity for Leading Institutional and Community Change.*

Table 3. Research Design

Research Questions	Methodology	Subjects
1. What were the founding assumptions that provided the conceptual framework for RCCI and how did these change over time?	• Case study • Focus group • Interviews	• 16 college case study sites • Representatives from non-case study sites • MDC staff
2. What intervention strategies proved successful in helping participating colleges achieve their RCCI goals? a. Under what conditions has RCCI brought about change and how?	• Survey • Case study • Focus Groups • Interviews	• All 24 colleges • 16 case study sites • MDC coaches • MDC staff
3. How were implementation strategies developed by participating colleges to achieve their own objectives?	• Case study • Interviews	• 16 case study sites • MDC coaches • MDC staff
4. What factors contributed to the success of failure of particular strategies and why?	• Survey (checklist and open-ended questions) • Case study • Focus group	• All 24 colleges • 16 case study sites • College representatives from non-case study sites
5. What value has RCCI added to participating colleges and communities as measured by a range of indicators of success? a. Indicators of success in student access to higher education and economic development could include: enrollment and retention, student support services, students served by distance education, curriculum reform, people served by loans or other financial support, jobs, community development organizations, etc. b. Indicators of success in institutional change could include: new partnerships and collaborations, structures, vitality and creativity, leadership, and institutional values.	• Survey (information request) to document indicators via checklist and open-ended questions; may include newspaper clippings, brochures, printouts, etc. • Document review / content analysis • Quantitative analysis of secondary data	• All 24 colleges
6. Based on analysis of data collected, to what extent were the Ford Foundation's assumptions confirmed about the relationship between access to higher education and economic development, and about the role of community colleges in improving access and economic development in distressed rural communities? a. What have we learned about how community colleges can promote access and economic development in rural communities?	• Summative analysis	• Assessment Team

Qualitative analysis

Case studies. The assessment team conducted case studies of 16 of the 24 colleges. The 16 case study sites included four colleges—with a mix of pilots and expansions—from each of the four RCCI regions: Delta/South, Southwest, Appalachia, and Northern Plains (tribal colleges). One assessment team member took responsibility for colleges in each of the four regions and made two site visits to each college in the region. During these visits, the researcher interviewed the college president, RCCI team leader and coordinator, faculty and administrators, students, community leaders, public school officials, and business people. Each researcher then prepared a regional report based on the four case studies and analyzed the findings with other team members at periodic team meetings.

Focus groups. The assessment team conducted facilitated focus groups with RCCI coaches, project directors, and MDC staff. In addition, they held focus groups at three colleges not included among the 16 case studies. The main purpose of these additional focus groups was to learn more about RCCI's impact on educational access, an issue that team members felt they needed to understand better at that point in their research.

Content analysis. The assessment team reviewed and analyzed reports and other documents from MDC and the colleges themselves. These documents included grant proposals, annual reports to the Ford Foundation, newspaper articles, and the colleges' written responses to questions about local RCCI projects and activities, challenges, and benefits.

Quantitative analysis

Environmental scan. Using secondary data, primarily from federal agencies, the team described (1) the economic and social characteristics of the colleges' service areas and (2) analyzed RCCI's possible impact on educational access and economic development. Economic and social characteristics included educational attainment, unemployment rates, per capita income, population growth, and poverty rates. Indicators of educational access included number of students enrolled and capture rates. Indicators of economic development (or more broadly, of economic well-being) included unemployment and job growth. These characteristics and indicators are discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

To understand RCCI's possible impact on educational access and economic development, the assessment team compared the pilot colleges with a group of nine control colleges. The control colleges were selected as representative of other rural community colleges in regions where the RCCI pilot colleges were located. They had these characteristics:

- no degree offerings higher than the associate level
- location in the same state as the pilots
- location within 200 miles of the pilots
- absence of any incorporated places with a population over 50,000 and
- the same type of governance (either state or tribal) as the pilot colleges.

Colleges selected for comparison were Lurleen B. Wallace Community College (Alabama), Maysville Community College (Kentucky), Ashland Community College (Kentucky), Northwest Mississippi Community College (Mississippi), Little Big Horn College (Montana), Dull Knife Memorial College (Montana), Stone Child College (Montana), San Juan College (New Mexico), and Western Texas College (Texas).

National survey. The assessment team distributed a questionnaire to RCCI team leaders, coordinators, and other team members at all 24 colleges. The questionnaire included background items on the respondent's type and length of involvement with RCCI. In addition, it included items on the respondent's perceptions of the relative importance of various intervention strategies and about RCCI's impact on institutional change, educational access, and economic development. An average of five people responded from each of the 24 colleges.

Site documentation. Finally, the assessment team asked all RCCI team leaders to provide data on measures of institutional change (e.g., grant proposals submitted and funded); measures of access (e.g., enrollment of previously underserved populations, credit/noncredit enrollments, course offerings); and measures of economic development (e.g., number of partnerships, small business start-ups, people in entrepreneurial training, and funding to support entrepreneurial training).

Synthesis

Members of the team met throughout the assessment period to analyze and reflect on their research. From their first team meeting, the researchers struggled with

how to measure RCCI's value. The emergent nature of the design—letting participants tell their stories and then comparing the stories across the regions—enabled the researchers to augment traditional quantitative measures with more qualitative, cross-regional results that would deepen and enrich the findings.

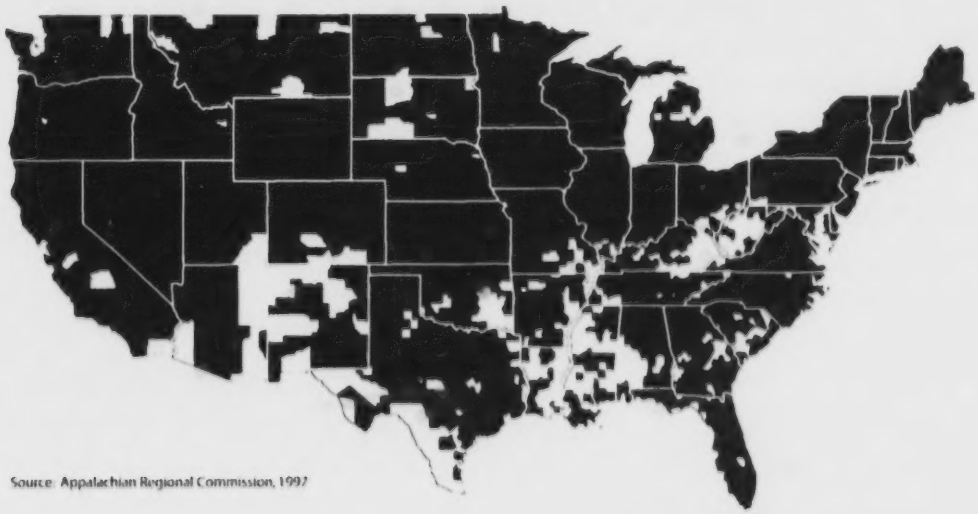
PART II. The Initiative and Its Context

Chapter 5. RCCI Colleges and Their Communities

The Ford Foundation and MDC expected to learn along the way as this demonstration project evolved, refining and formalizing their approach as time went by. The learning process was nowhere more apparent than in the selection of the 24 colleges.

From the beginning, Ford and MDC were committed to getting enough diversity to help them understand RCCI's larger-scale potential to improve access and economic development. To some extent when the nine pilot colleges were selected in 1994, and much more explicitly when the 15 expansion sites were chosen in 1997, Ford and MDC looked for a mix of situations. They sought variation in local economies, institutional and presidential experiences, and cultural perspectives. To help find lessons on how to strengthen community college relationships with universities, they included branch colleges of two universities in the mix. They made a critical decision to cluster the colleges in only four regions of the country, knowing that distance would be a barrier to the kind of intense work to follow. Figure 1 shows the distressed regions of the United States from which the 24 RCCI demonstration colleges were selected.

Figure 1. Economically Distressed Counties



Source: Appalachian Regional Commission, 1997

RCCI's nine pilot and 15 expansion colleges are listed in Table 4. Six RCCI colleges were in Appalachia, seven in the Mississippi Delta/South, five in the Southwest, and six (tribal colleges and universities) in the Northern Plains.

Table 4. RCCI Colleges and 1997 Enrollments

Region/College	Pilot/Expansion	Enrollment (1997)
Appalachia		
Danville Community College, VA	Expansion	3,526
Hazard Community College, KY	Pilot	2,220
Mountain Empire Community College, VA	Expansion	2,820
Prestonsburg Community College, KY	Expansion	2,509
Somerset Community College, KY	Expansion	2,557
Southeast Community College, KY	Pilot	2,104
Delta-South		
Alabama Southern Community College, AL	Pilot	1,417
Coahoma Community College, MS	Pilot	1,141
Meridian Community College, MS	Expansion	3,007
Phillips Community College, AR	Expansion	2,494
Southeastern Community College, NC	Expansion	1,610
Technical College of the Lowcountry, SC	Expansion	1,822
Wallace Community College-Selma, AL	Expansion	1,799
Northern Plains (tribal colleges)		
Blackfeet Community College, MT	Expansion	411
Fort Belknap College, MT	Pilot	218
Fort Peck Community College, MT	Pilot	360
Salish Kootenai College, MT	Pilot	967
Sinte Gleska University, SD	Expansion	766
Sitting Bull College, ND	Expansion	217
Southwest		
Laredo Community College, TX	Expansion	7,446
New Mexico State University-Carlsbad, NM	Expansion	1,144
Northern New Mexico Community College, NM	Pilot	2,134
Southwest Texas Junior College, TX	Pilot	3,415
University of New Mexico-Gallup, NM	Expansion	2,588

Among the 24 colleges, 1997 enrollments ranged from a low of just over 200 students at tribal institutions (Sitting Bull College and Fort Belknap College) to a high of about 7,400 at Laredo Community College (Table 4). All tribal colleges had enrollments under 1,000.

The colleges varied not only in size but also in the breadth of their geographic focus, the economic context in which they operated, and their governance systems,

which were a function of state higher education policy except in the case of tribal colleges. The 16 colleges selected as case studies for AACC's assessment illustrated many of these differences.

Appalachia

The Appalachian case study colleges were Hazard Community College in Hazard, Southeast Community College in Cumberland, Somerset Community College in Somerset (all in Kentucky), and Mountain Empire Community College in Big Stone Gap, Virginia. The three Kentucky colleges became part of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), established in 1997 amidst some controversy as the community colleges were separated from the University of Kentucky and moved into a new statewide system. Mountain Empire Community College, serving southwestern Virginia as the newest member of the Virginia Community College System, was also part of a state system that encourages individual community college foundations to seek financial assistance for local needs. All four colleges served large multicounty areas with significant geographic barriers to travel. Hazard, Southeast, and Somerset resolved this challenge with a dependence on satellite campuses. RCCI influence on these satellite campuses was variable. For example, Hazard used outreach as an RCCI tool while Southeast and Somerset concentrated on their home communities. Three of the four case study colleges are located deep in the heart of the Appalachian coalfields where out-migration of working adults and families was a continual problem. The fourth, Somerset, is located in the foothills of Appalachia with a more agricultural heritage and a recent history of manufacturing.

Delta/South

The four community colleges selected for case studies in the Delta and South represented diverse institutions in four states: Alabama Southern Community College in Monroeville, Alabama; Coahoma Community College in Clarksdale, Mississippi; Southeastern Community College in Whiteville, North Carolina; and Technical College of the Lowcountry in Beaufort, South Carolina. Their common heritage was defined by years of strained race relations and an agricultural economy threatened by globalization and demographic changes. Coahoma, Southeastern, and Technical College of the Lowcountry are all part of

comprehensive state higher education systems. Alabama Southern is in a state that had been working on restructuring its community and technical college system throughout the RCCI era. Like other small, rural RCCI colleges, none had been power brokers in their respective states. One official described a college as "not ready for prime time."[13] While they all served communities that had large disparities in income and wealth, Technical College of the Lowcountry faced particular challenges in the contrast between the ultra-wealthy Hilton Head resort community and the high-poverty communities that dominated the rest of its four-county service area.

Northern Plains (tribal colleges)

The four case study tribal colleges offered yet another set of contrasts. They came from four states yet state affiliation was virtually irrelevant. They were chartered by tribal governing bodies, were under the jurisdiction of the tribe, and generally received no state funding. The two Montana colleges were Fort Peck Community College and Salish Kootenai Community College. Fort Peck, chartered by the government of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, is located in Poplar, Montana, the capital of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana, serves American Indians on the Flathead Indian Reservation. In Rosebud, South Dakota, Sinte Gleska University serves the Pine Ridge Reservation and was charted by the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Spanning both North and South Dakota, Sitting Bull College (chartered by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council) serves the Standing Rock Reservation from Fort Yates, North Dakota. Tribal colleges and universities are different from other community colleges in several ways. The concept of leadership is one example. Tribal college and university presidents are "among the people"—attainable, responsible, and involved in community. These institutions are concerned primarily with one cultural group—American Indians—and specifically, those residing on or near their respective reservations. There also are differences among these colleges, since American Indian governing bodies differ structurally from tribe to tribe.

With the exceptions of Danville in Virginia and Laredo in Texas, the 24 RCCI colleges are all located in rural parts of the country. All, including Danville and Laredo, serve rural people.

[13] Site visit interview.

Southwest

The four case study colleges in the Southwest—Laredo Community College in Laredo, Texas, Northern New Mexico Community College in Española, New Mexico State University (NMSU) at Carlsbad, and Southwest Texas Junior College in Uvalde—illustrated other aspects of institutional diversity. Northern New Mexico and NMSU-Carlsbad, for example, have two different forms of governance. Northern New Mexico was chartered as a community college and has a direct relationship with the state legislature. In contrast, NMSU-Carlsbad is a branch campus that depends on the Las Cruces campus of NMSU for its governance structure. These two structures influence the culture, traditions, and funding at each college. The two Texas colleges represent other governance issues, as well as differences in economic context, strongly influenced by the changes brought about by the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Compared with the U.S. as a whole and with all non-metropolitan (non-metro) or rural counties, people who live in RCCI service areas are less likely to have a high school diploma, more likely to be unemployed, and more than twice as likely to have incomes below the poverty level (Table 5). In addition, their per capita income is lower than that of the U.S. population as a whole and lower than that of all non-metro residents. On average, 1990-2000 population growth rates in RCCI service areas were lower than for the U.S. as a whole but higher than for all non-metro counties taken together. (Population in several of the largest service areas, including Laredo and Northern New Mexico, grew dramatically in the 1990s.) In sum, RCCI colleges serve areas that are characterized by greater poverty, less educational attainment, more unemployment, and lower incomes than the United States as a whole, and than the rest of rural America.[14]

[14] Data for areas served by individual RCCI colleges are presented in Appendix Tables A-E.

Table 5. Demographic and Economic Characteristics, RCCI Service Areas, All Non-Metro Counties, and U.S., Selected Years

Characteristic	RCCI Service Areas	All Non-Metro Counties	U.S.
Population change (1990-2000) a	12.3%	10.3%	13.2%
Persons 25 years and older who have not completed high school (selected years) b	37.6%	20.4%	6.4%
Unemployment rate (average annual, 1997) c	9.8%	5.2%	4.9%
Per capita income (1997) d	$15,794	$19,422	$25,412
Persons with income below poverty level (1999) e	28.4%	13.4%	12.4%

(a) RCCI service area and U.S. data from 1990 and 2000 Census of Population, U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov). All non-metro counties data from ERS, USDA, (www.ers.usda.gov), based on 2000 Census.

(b) RCCI service area and U.S. data from 2000 Census of Population, U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov). All non-metro counties data from ERS, USDA (www.ers.usda.gov), based on Current Population Survey, 1998.

(c) RCCI service area and U.S. data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. All non-metro counties data from Current Population Survey for 1997, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

(d) RCCI service area, all non-metro counties, and U.S. data from Bureau of Economic Analysis, Local Area Personal Income (www.bea.gov).

(e) RCCI service area and U.S. data from 2000 Census of Population, U.S. Bureau of the Census (www.census.gov). All non-metro counties data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, based on Current Population Survey 2000.

The human side of these statistics was reflected in themes that came up repeatedly during interviews and content analysis conducted for the assessment. Here is a sample of what team members heard and read about life in RCCI communities:

- ECONOMY
  - Businesses were closing and laying off workers.
  - There were no jobs for displaced workers.
  - The community could not attract jobs that pay good wages.
  - Businesses perceive—sometimes with good reason—that the workforce lacked basic skills and job readiness. Employers could not find skilled workers.
  - People did not have skills they need to start their own businesses.

- People did not have capital to finance their own businesses.
- Economic development agencies did not cooperate.

■ EDUCATION

- The quality of K-12 education was terrible.
- Schools were inflexible.
- Education was not universally valued.

■ CLIMATE

- Races and classes were divided.
- There were turf battles among educational institutions.
- Social service providers did not cooperate.
- Communities were insular.
- Leadership was spread too thin.
- People resisted change.

In short, RCCI communities experienced problems common among many rural places, especially those that are persistently poor. RCCI developed an array of strategies to address these problems.

Chapter 6.
Intervention Strategies: An RCCI Primer

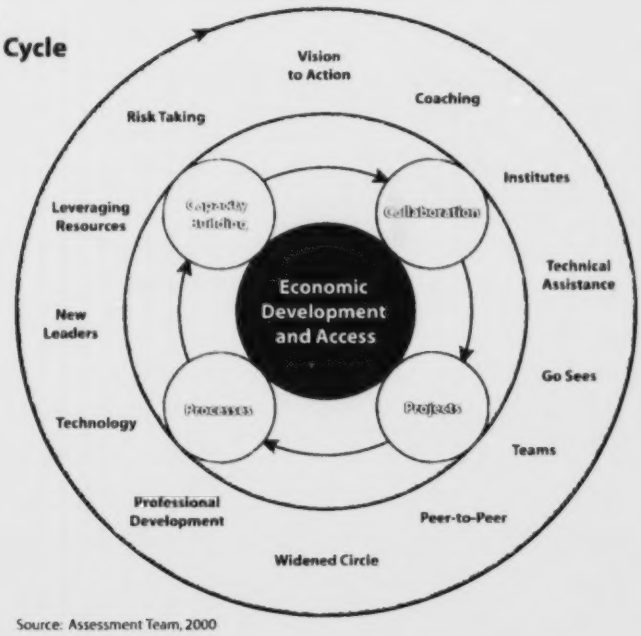
The intervention strategies designed and managed by MDC grew as RCCI grew. During the early years when only the pilot colleges composed the RCCI network, techniques were refined as needed. Never static, the intervention strategies evolved to meet institutional needs, the demand for different learning experiences, and local circumstances. Regardless of changes made during this "intervention evolution" period, one factor remained constant: cultural context. Respect for intercultural differences was sacrosanct.

By the time the expansion colleges joined RCCI in 1997, the main components of the intervention plan had become formalized. The intervention strategies included:

- team building
- coaching
- Vision to Action strategic planning
- national institutes
- technical assistance
- other learning opportunities
- E-mail, newsletter, toolkit
- implementation grants

MDC provided or facilitated the first seven elements, which are the subject of this chapter. Figure 2, the "RCCI cycle," shows the interrelationships among these elements. The Ford Foundation made the implementation grants directly to the colleges, as described in Chapter 7 and illustrated in Table 6.

Figure 2.
The RCCI Cycle



Source: Assessment Team, 2000

Team Approach

Each college formed a college-community team ("the RCCI team") to conduct strategic planning and implement RCCI access and development strategies. MDC used the team approach as a way to bring different voices to the table, engaging and benefiting more people in the community. This approach was consistent with a recommendation in *The Knowledge Net*, which urged community colleges to help forge positive relationships among diverse segments of society.[15]

Teams looked different at each college. They varied in terms of (1) the balance between college and community members, (2) involvement and support on the college president's part, and (3) the makeup and responsibilities of the team.

As the colleges' RCCI work evolved, some colleges reconfigured their teams, changing the balance between college and community representatives. Some created a second tier of action teams. Many recruited new participants to relieve original members (although in some cases this created problems of its own when newcomers sometimes felt disconnected). In general, the team approach involved and motivated new people in leadership positions. It also gave structure to the college-community partnership. Generally speaking, the college-community team

[15] For more discussion of the civic role of community colleges, see *The Knowledge Net: Connecting Communities, Learners, and Colleges*, page 4.

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strategy was articulated and emphasized more at the expansion colleges than at the pilot colleges.

Coaching

Each of the 24 colleges had a coach who worked with the college roughly 12 days per year. Each coach typically worked with two to five colleges. During the pilot phase, MDC staff (and a non-staff American Indian hired to coach the tribal colleges) served as coaches. After 1997, MDC engaged seven additional consultants to provide coaching services and managed their services to the colleges.

The role of the coaches was to help colleges conduct their planning processes and, later, to help them implement their plans. In practice, the coaches provided cohesion, consistency across the sites, and a constant source of feedback to MDC. It is difficult to imagine how the RCCI model and philosophy could have been transferred to all 24 colleges without the coaches, or how MDC staff could have continued to improve the intervention strategies as they went along.

The coaches served different purposes depending on their personal strengths. Some were better at helping colleges organize the logistics of their RCCI work, while others excelled in helping the teams reflect, learn, and plan.

Not all the colleges wanted or needed the same level of coaching. One of the pilot colleges already had a strong view of what it intended to do before the MDC staff person became its coach. In contrast, one of the expansion colleges took longer to understand and work through the planning process and required more of the coach's time. Only in the later years of the RCCI demonstration did that team finalize its strategic goals with respect to access and economic development.

Vision to Action

Each college-community team undertook a Vision to Action (V-to-A) strategic planning process that was facilitated by the coaches. In the conceptual framework document, MDC described the process this way:

> *The journey begins with an intensive planning process in which the team uses data to analyze the "current state" at the college and in the region. It then assesses the college's strengths and capacity to promote economic development and improved educational access. Based on its assessment of*

> *problems and opportunities, the planning team creates a vision and specific goals.*
>
> *The planning team then explores strategic alternatives, which may include new initiatives of the college and joint college/community efforts. Team members seek out the best programmatic ideas from around the country, and adapt them to fit local circumstances.*[16]

The pilot colleges had 12 months and the expansions six months for V-to-A planning. Like other intervention strategies, V-to-A looked very different at different colleges. Members of the team at Coahoma Community College saw it as a new and valuable kind of planning process because they "owned it," team members told a member of the assessment team. After struggling for months to decide what their priorities were, they reached a turning point at retreat facilitated by MDC staff. There, they realized through V-to-A that they needed to focus on capacity building before tackling access or economic development.

At another college, V-to-A was used successfully very early. According to a banker who had been on the team from the beginning, V-to-A allowed them to involve people who would be affected by RCCI. This made a difference to minorities, workers, and others who would not normally be at the table. According to the banker, "Team building and Vision to Action are the critical pieces. That's how it all begins."[17]

At many sites, it was the involvement and commitment of the president who influenced the extent to which the college embraced and used the V-to-A concept. Presidents who appeared to be most open to shared decision-making used it to the greatest extent and most effectively. Colleges that used V-to-A less effectively, or not at all, tended to be led by presidents who believed in a traditional hierarchical management approach with a single decision-maker who had fixed strategies for planning already in place.

Technical Assistance

In addition to their coaches, MDC offered the RCCI colleges the option of using technical assistance consultants (the "TA pool") for up to 10 days a year. As with the other intervention strategies, MDC and the colleges went through a learning process with technical assistance. In the beginning, colleges could choose only

[16] *Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative*, September 2001, page 24.

[17] Site visit interview.

consultants from a list of MDC-identified experts. Later, consultants were chosen by the colleges themselves.

Almost all the colleges eventually took advantage of the technical assistance. Sinte Gleska University, for example, brought in consultants to help with:

- strategic planning and training local people to be involved in planning
- training K-12 teachers to improve writing across the curriculum
- arts marketing
- community financial education (teaching people to improve their credit records, for example), and
- conducting case study research.

While Sinte Gleska used consultants with a wide range of specialties, other colleges focused on one topic or set of learning activities. For example, Southeast Community College had a very focused interest in economic development. The team brought in a consultant from the state data center to help them look at "big picture" economic trends and a nationally known economic development professional to lead a summit on the local economy. After a field trip to look at economic development efforts in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, they used another consultant to help develop specific plans for a community loan fund.

National Institutes

National institutes, without exception, served to unite and authenticate participants. While one RCCI institute was held for presidents and team leaders, a second invited all RCCI participants. They were held annually, nearly always on an RCCI college campus. (One presidents/team leaders institute convened in Washington, D.C., where participants could take advantage of proximity to policymakers as speakers.) The idea was that rural colleges needed to visit other rural colleges and get a taste of local culture and politics in other locations. Early institutes were designed by MDC staff and relied heavily on outside presenters. As colleges matured in their RCCI experience and gained confidence in what they had learned--challenges as well as successes—they began planning the institutes themselves and included more and more RCCI college leaders as speakers and facilitators. Each institute drew more attendees than the last, partly because of the desire of some colleges to expose new team or community members to the "RCCI experience." More than 175 people attended

the Carlsbad, New Mexico, institute in January 2002, the last institute of RCCI's demonstration phase.

Other Shared Learning Opportunities

In addition, the colleges took the opportunity to participate in at least six other learning opportunities, including field trips to other colleges and sites of interest. These included the "case competition" at Southwest Texas Junior College in Uvalde in March 1998, where graduate students from four universities studied the region's economy, devised economic development strategies, and presented their ideas to a panel of regional leaders and international experts in a competition for prize money. Other examples of learning opportunities included:

- Leadership Development Seminar (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, April 1998)
- Economic Development in Indian Country Seminar (Albuquerque, New Mexico, September 1999)
- Moving Mountains Economic Summit (Big Stone Gap, Virginia, November 1999)
- Economic Summit Seminar (Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, February 2000)
- K-12 School Reform Study Trip to Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) as implemented in Newark Public Schools (Newark, New Jersey, February 2001).

E-mail, newsletter, and toolkit

A team member from Southeast Community College managed an e-mail subscription list intended to share information about funding opportunities, pertinent research, and policy issues. MDC published the *Rooster*, a periodic newsletter covering the RCCI initiative and reporting on its development and results, as well as a collection of print and video materials in the RCCI Toolkit. Called "Strategies for Rural Development and Increased Access to Education," the toolkit included 10 videos, three guidebooks, and a notebook of resources—all to help college-community teams develop effective strategies for educational access and economic development.

Overall Approach of Intervention Strategies

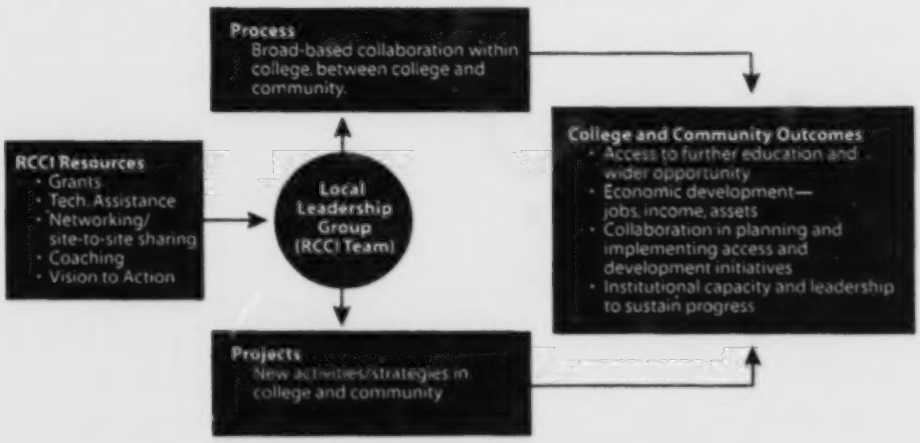
The invention strategies revolved around RCCI's twin goals of improved access and economic development, as illustrated in the RCCI cycle (Figure 2). Four categories of what might be called mega-objectives emerged: collaboration, capacity building, processes, and projects. Every college asserted its own style and addressed these objectives in its own way, but the approach was, or became, dynamic and circular. A specific RCCI project may have been highly visible but its successful implementation was possible only because one person collaborated with another, a process was in place, and the community had some capacity to pull it off. Similarly, collaborators needed a focus (i.e., project or process) for their collaboration. Risk taking became the norm as RCCI participants began to develop professionally, go on field trips (sometimes referred to as "go sees"), use technology, widen the circle of players, leverage resources, and learn from institutes, coaches, experts, and each other. RCCI participants learned to create visions and planned to make them come true by relying on complex and interconnected strategies. Quick fixes for longstanding challenges were not likely in these communities.

In short, as third-party manager, MDC made these key contributions:

- hands-on coaching, support, and sharing
- peer-to-peer cross-cultural learning
- tools for self-assessment and planning
- permission to try, fail, try again
- partnerships and collaborations.

The relationships among the intervention strategies and college implementation efforts are further illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The RCCI Process for Institutional Capacity Building and Community Change, 1994–2001


Process
Broad-based collaboration within college, between college and community.
RCCI Resources
• Grants
• Tech. Assistance
• Networking/ site-to-site sharing
• Coaching
• Vision to Action
Local Leadership Group (RCCI Team)
College and Community Outcomes
• Access to further education and wider opportunity
• Economic development—jobs, income, assets
• Collaboration in planning and implementing access and development initiatives
• Institutional capacity and leadership to sustain progress
Projects
New activities/strategies in college and community

Source: MDC, Inc., August 2000.

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Chapter 7: Implementation Projects: RCCI in Action

Besides receiving assistance from MDC, as described in the previous chapter, each college received planning and implementation grants directly from the Ford Foundation. Grants ranged from $20,000 to $200,000, for a total of $4,245,000 over the course of the demonstration phase of RCCI. Financial support and support in the form of technical assistance and other kinds of professional development are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Support to RCCI Colleges, 1994-2002

	FORD GRANTS			PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT			
Phase	**Planning**	**Implementation**	**Total Grant Funding per College**	**Institutes/ Forums**	**Technical Assistance**	**Coaching**	**Field Trips/ Optional Learning Events**
Pilot Colleges (9)	1994 - $30,000	1995 - $150,000 1997 - $100,000 2000 - $ 75,000	$355,000	14 events	25 days per college	66 days per college	8 events
Expansion Colleges (15)	1997 - $20,000	1998 - $100,000 2000 - $100,000	$270,000	11 events	20 days per college	36 days per college	6 events
TOTALS			$4,245,000 (24 colleges)	14 events	525 days (24 colleges)	1,034 days (24 colleges)	8 events

Source: *College reports and MDC, Inc., 2002.*

The planning grants were intended to help the colleges work through the Vision to Action process and develop their action plans. As the name suggests, the purpose of the implementation grants was to help the colleges carry out those plans.

The conceptual framework for RCCI offered a "fuzzy boundary"—one that spoke well to community colleges. It established general parameters for implementation projects in the two goal areas of access and economic development. Since projects were to evolve from the RCCI visioning process, they varied widely from place to place, and true to Ford's intent, were reflective of local needs and situations. Though some projects grew from ideas discussed on campus before RCCI, others emerged as a result of participation in institutes or field trips, or from ideas gleaned from coaches, technical assistance consultants, or peers at other colleges.

Economic Development

Economic development implementation projects took many forms (see Table 7). Some colleges worked on what might be considered traditional community college involvement in workforce-related economic development; others took more nontraditional routes. New relationships with local industries to provide job training and basic educational opportunities for local residents seemed to top the list. For example, North Carolina's Southeastern Community College found a successful niche in training workers for international firms who brought their business to the region. Through its New and Expanding Industry Training program, Southeastern customized training programs to meet the needs of international companies locating in its service area, such as France's Conflandey, Inc., Germany's Filtec Precise, and Japan's Sumitomo Electric Lightwave, Inc. The program offered interpreters, on-the-job-training, train-the trainer sponsored trips to parent companies, and use of trainers from mother plants. The college provided office and support services for the companies in its business and industry training building, allowing companies to set up production lines for training and production purposes. Plant employees relocating in Columbus County from other areas, including international workers, received relocation assistance from the college.

Table 7. Examples of RCCI Economic Development Activities

- New workforce development and career centers
- New relationships with local industries to provide expanded job training and basic educational opportunities for workers
- Small business development centers and business incubators
- Tribal business information centers
- Business resource and economic outreach teams
- Culturally appropriate entrepreneurship education programs
- Loan fund for new and emerging small businesses
- Savings programs
- Local community development corporations
- Community days and economic summits
- Reorganization of internal structures for economic development
- Designation as Enterprise Community
- Water and sewer projects
- Fish farming and beef cooperatives
- Tourism development
- Commercial food kitchen
- Regional community partnerships
- Leadership development

Sources: Site visit reports; college responses to assessment team survey, 2000.

Coahoma Community College used RCCI funds to fund a Skill Tech Center, to teach everything from parenting and job readiness skills to spatial information analysis. Since RCCI, the center's high-tech classes have attracted employees from agricultural firms, and the center piloted classes for a utility company and a mining firm. Southwest Texas Junior College developed a new workforce development center in Eagle Pass, a border community in the college's service area. The center was self-supporting and running at full capacity within its first year of operation.

Other colleges used RCCI implementation grants to focus on less traditional workforce strategies. These included encouraging entrepreneurship and small business development, and mobilizing regional leadership around development issues. Southeast Community College was one example. The college played a key leadership role in creating the Appalachian Development Alliance. Eight development funds pooled resources and accessed new sources of capital to encourage business development in eastern Kentucky. At least three colleges established local community development corporations to expand business opportunities in their areas. Other colleges created small business development centers and adopted culturally appropriate entrepreneurship education programs, such as those to develop a tribal quilting business.

Several colleges convened economic summits for local leaders that attracted national media coverage. For example, Technical College of the Lowcountry brought together leaders from its four-county service area in South Carolina to consider options for regional development. Because of its status as a neutral institution, the college could help participants think beyond their individual interests and begin discussing how they could work together. North Dakota's Sitting Bull College became a leader in planning for economic development recovery by organizing community meetings regarding issues relating to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation's longstanding dispute over federal money owed to the tribe. Sitting Bull also began preparing a new economic development strategy to take advantage of burgeoning national interest in the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which crossed reservation lands, and the college gained approval to develop a scenic byway.

Many colleges reorganized their internal structures to better emphasize economic development and job-training activities. They became involved in fish farming, beef cooperatives, tourism development, leadership development, business

incubation, a commercial kitchen, and a variety of other projects not generally associated with higher education nor previously available in these distressed rural communities. Most reported that RCCI had empowered community members to do what they could do.

In addition to economic development, a significant number of RCCI colleges used implementation grants to support or spark broader *community development.* One of the best examples was Mountain Empire Community College. It achieved important success with its Coalfield Water Development Fund, a national demonstration project that uses federal and state money to bring clean water to poor communities. The idea for this project had been discussed for some time but not going anywhere before RCCI came along. When the college became involved with RCCI, the team "shined a light on the idea," as one member said, and it took off rapidly. The connection with Ford and RCCI had "certified" the water venture as an appropriate project for the community college to support.

It is reasonable to ask whether it is a stretch for community colleges to go beyond their historic mission of academic and workforce programs into the broader field of economic and even community development. The answer is "yes," according to David Buettner, a non-RCCI community college president who served as a member of AACC's national advisory panel for the RCCI assessment. The reason why is simple: State funding policies are based on college enrollment. In areas where many rural colleges, including RCCI colleges, are located, where population and the economy are only stable or declining, community colleges *must* focus on economic and community development or they cannot survive financially. It is in their vital interest to develop their economy and community, whatever that requires.

In response to AACC's survey of RCCI colleges conducted for this assessment, 23 colleges reported developing 193 economic partnerships during their RCCI funding period through March 2001. Thirteen colleges reported a total of 716 small business start-ups, and 14 reported capital available to support local entrepreneurship programs valued at $18.4 million (Table 8). Many of these activities were connected only marginally to RCCI funding, but most were a direct result of the affiliation with the Ford Foundation and the new environment and capacities nurtured by RCCI.

Table 8. Funds and Opportunities Leveraged by RCCI, 1997-2000

College	No. of Grant	No. of Successful Grants Proposals	Value of Funded Grants	No. of Economic Partnerships	No. of Graduates Employed	No. of Small Businesses	No. in Entrepreneurial Training Obtained	No. in Entrepreneurial Funds
Blackfeet Community College	11	6	$2,973,809	N/A	N/A	161	1,525	0
Danville Community College	61	49	$14,150,136	90%	152	215	80,000	
Fort Peck Community College		20	$1,286,436	21	30	40	1,440	1,500,000
Fort Belknap College	N/A	N/A	N/A	14	N/A	4	6	407,500
Hazard Community College	19	14	$6,345,466	26	N/A	11	79	N/A
Laredo Community College	9	2	$502,027	20	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Meridian Community College	N/A	22	$5,102,740	8	N/A	34	4,739	1,900,000
Mountain Empire Community College	40	36	$14,660,182	4	190	N/A	774	N/A
New Mexico State University–Carlsbad	3	2	$2,100,000	3	80	N/A	42	14,200,000
Northern New Mexico Community College	117	78	$14,768,826	3	835	79	N/A	20,000
Prestonsburg Community College	5	5	$3,403,000	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Salish Kootenai College	60	50	$11,968,696	25	N/A	250	800	100,000
Sinte Gleska University	40	28	$22,661,073	4	272	39	64	Variable
Somerset Community College	8	8	$2,317,175	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Southeastern Community College	N/A	93	$3,419,836	12	N/A	101	25	N/A
Southwest Texas Junior College	56	39	$7,446,335	8	900	N/A	40	N/A
Technical College of the Lowcountry	65	41	$4,757,912	12	276	N/A	12	N/A
Wallace Community College -Selma	11	8	$3,570,905	10	424	6	18	250,000
TOTALS	505	501	$131,434,554	193		877	9,779	18,457,500

Source: Self-report data gathered from RCCI colleges, 2000. Not all colleges responded. "N/A" means no response on that item.

Educational Access

In the beginning, few colleges saw access to postsecondary education as a higher priority than economic development. They viewed their community's economic development needs as more pressing and tended to believe that they were already addressing access issues. They were, after all, "open door" institutions. As they began to understand economic development more thoroughly, however, and as community representatives became stronger partners on the teams, the complexities of the access question surfaced. Access was more than the open door. Who was not coming through the open door? What did it mean for the community if segments of the population remained unskilled or uneducated?

Once the colleges focused on access, their early projects (especially at the pilot colleges) tended to rely on more traditional retention and distance learning strategies. Later efforts recognized the need to address family and community issues that affected perceptions about higher education or education in general. Some examples of new approaches to access are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Examples of New Access Activities at RCCI Colleges

- Revamped developmental studies programs
- Distance learning programs
- Outreach at Salvation Army center
- Mentoring and tutoring programs
- Student success center
- Retention team
- Service learning program
- Youth leadership program
- Dual and accelerated enrollment program
- College ambassador program
- One-stop career placement centers
- Programs to increase workforce literacy and job skills
- Bus transportation
- Childcare services/child development center
- Family health clinics/wellness centers
- Family educational support and service centers
- Family literacy program
- Health and education collaborative
- Neighborhood educational opportunity center
- Special initiatives to help minorities, underserved males, and welfare recipients
- Aggressive recruitment program
- Expanded collaborations with local K-12 systems and Head Start
- K-16 project
- NASA Challenger Learning Center
- New programs in math, science, computer literacy, writing, and the arts
- Expansion of GED opportunities
- Community summit

Sources: Site visit reports; college responses to assessment team survey, 2000.

Some projects, such as Fort Peck Community College's Center for Family and Community Development, developed outreach programs that literally transported people to the college. Sitting Bull College, too, saw that transportation was a serious barrier to access to education and offered new bus service on the reservation.

Sinte Gleska College focused on student retention as an access issue and recognized that many of its students lacked basic necessities that would enable them to stay in school. As a result, the college began providing childcare services and transportation for students who did not have cars. Other colleges, like Southeast and Coahoma, developed mentoring programs that matched college students with faculty members.

Alabama Southern used RCCI funds to design a new developmental studies program based on multiple learning styles. Others expanded distance learning opportunities and created mentoring and tutoring programs. Several established one-stop career placement centers and programs to increase workforce literacy and job skills. Buses, childcare, and family health clinics became priority access strategies.

At least five colleges developed special initiatives to assist minorities or to address the problems of underserved males, and many campuses launched special programs for welfare recipients. (One of the disappointments of RCCI is that no college was able to make significant headway in bringing more males to campus. More research is needed to examine the extent of this problem and factors contributing to it.)

When Southeastern Community College realized that certain minority groups were not coming to the college, it hired a minority recruiter to go to them. Fort Belknap College offered new community outreach workshops to tribal members. Danville Community College sought new students through advertising on a local race car and a new outreach center at the Salvation Army. Wallace Community College-Selma developed an aggressive recruitment plan and sought out young people through its dual and accelerated enrollment program.

Almost all of the colleges expanded their collaborations with local K-12 systems. They created counseling and scholarship programs and enhanced math and computer literacy programs, virtual courses, and elementary tutoring opportunities. RCCI funds encouraged the opening of new Head Start programs,

expansion of GED opportunities, arts programs shared with local public schools, family educational support programs, and summer writing programs. Although relationships with K-12 schools improved at many RCCI sites, relationships with area development districts and other government agencies were sometimes obstacles. In one case, state policy prevented a college from offering training and being the one-stop center for education and training.

Meridian Community College and Laredo Community College provided good examples of how colleges can work with elementary and secondary schools to begin promoting access to higher education. According to the Meridian team leader, the biggest challenge was that students were not prepared for college-level classes when they arrived as freshmen. To solve this problem, Meridian organized "MathFirst," an effort to improve public education in the community. MathFirst partners used multiple strategies to achieve this goal, including elementary school reform (Success for All and Roots and Wings); middle school reform (Success for All); parental involvement in classrooms; and collaboration with local businesses to introduce practical problem solving into math curricula. Meridian's MathFirst program was one of RCCI's best examples of a successful partnership between a college and K-12 schools.

Laredo initiated a summer institute called *Familias Pueden* for children from two elementary schools (one in the city and one in a colonia[18]) and their families. The institute was run by college students who work as teachers and mentors to the children. The idea was to introduce children and their parents to the college while giving the college students hands-on leadership and teaching skills. Mothers of children in the program said that before RCCI, they did not know how to excite their children about learning; they did not know how to talk about education. *Familias Pueden* helped them do just that. For the first time, the mothers understood that parents and their children should think about college when the children were young, rather than wait until their children finished high school.

A final example of education as community development is a fledgling theater program for high school students hosted by Somerset Community College. The program related to community cultural development projects and raised student aspirations by bringing high school students to the community college.

[18] Colonia refers to an unincorporated settlement that often lacks safe housing and basic services. Texas colonias along the Mexican border are isolated in a rural area or outside city limits. (Definition from *Texas Colonias: A Thumbnail Sketch of the Conditions, Issues, Challenges and Opportunities*, by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas (post-1996 based on references). http://www.dallasfed.org/htm/pubs/ca/colonias.html, accessed November 18, 2002.

Overall Impact of Implementation Grants

The implementation of specific action projects served many functions within the RCCI process. Projects not only provided an opportunity for college-community teams to apply information from the national institutes, visioning process, field trips, and other intervention activities. They also helped to sustain enthusiasm, broaden the base of leadership, and demonstrate the potential for reform.

While the implementation grants themselves were comparatively small, most colleges learned to use their RCCI dollars and the status of being a Ford Foundation grant recipient as seed money to leverage other funds. By 2000, 23 colleges had reported winning 495 new grants valued at nearly $131 million since they had become part of RCCI. Hazard Community College leveraged RCCI resources to help acquire a NASA Challenger Center to promote math and science education, and later to help establish a school for crafts on a new branch campus. Somerset Community College learned how to leverage money and, according to one participant, was "poised to act rather than react to funding opportunities." Mountain Empire Community College used RCCI funds to finish projects started with other funding sources so that they were in a better position to show results when they applied for additional grants.

This expanded view of the college's role in access and economic development helped the colleges to redefine their goals as educational institutions and to reconsider the relationship between the education and training of individuals and the development of wealth and well-being in the community as a whole. One college rewrote its mission statement to include economic development, which had not been considered part of its mission prior to RCCI. For some colleges, this expanded view meant a return to a more traditional rural view of prosperity that integrated family, community, economy, and education into a unified whole.

College staff gained not only the skills and knowledge to become entrepreneurial in raising external dollars but also the confidence to attempt major new projects. The total number of college-initiated access and economic development activities grew significantly on RCCI campuses over time.

The breadth and number of projects launched on a given campus tended to increase with the length of participation in RCCI, the growth of institutional capacity, and the widening of community participation on the local team. As one college described it, RCCI created a web of interconnected activities. Mountain

Empire, for example, leveraged its development of a small business incubator to an economic summit, to a federal GEAR-UP grant for K-12 educational reform. Each step built on the previous one, even though the projects were very different.

PART III. Findings from the Assessment

Chapter 8. Did RCCI Achieve Its Main Goals?

The assessment team used secondary data from federal sources and primary data from the colleges to examine whether RCCI achieved its main goals of improving educational access, economic development, and institutional capacity. This chapter provides an analysis of data for the nine pilot colleges and, in some instances, for nine comparison colleges used as a control group. Comparison colleges were selected so as to be representative of other rural community colleges in the regions where RCCI pilot colleges are located. (See Chapter 4 for more details.)

Educational Access

To examine RCCI's possible impact on educational access, the assessment team compared indicators for two time periods: five years before (1990-1994) and five years after (1995-1999) the pilots' first implementation grants were made. Across the nine pilot colleges, total enrollment—including full- and part-time students enrolled for credit—increased by about 8 percent from 1990-1994 to 1995-1999 (Table 10). Enrollments increased substantially from the first to the second period at colleges in the Northern Plains and Southwest. The Appalachian colleges lost enrollment and those in the South made modest gains.

Table 10. Average Pilot College Enrollments and Capture Rates, Before and After the Beginning of RCCI

Region	Enrollments (a)			Capture Rates (b)		
	Pre-RCCI (percentage)	Post-RCCI (number)	Percent Change	Pre-RCCI (percentage)	Post-RCCI (percentage)	Change
Appalachia	4,068	4,010	-1.43	2.4	2.4	0
Delta South	2,464	2,493	1.18	0.8	0.8	0.01
Southwest	4,542	5,303	16.75	1.3	1.4	0.10
Northern Plains	1,317	1,551	17.77	2.2	2.5	0.28
Total	12,392	13,357	7.79	1.4	1.5	0.06

Pre-RCCI is 1990-1994. Post-RCCI is 1995-1999.

(a) Enrollment is the number of part-time and full-time students enrolled in credit classes during fall semester.

(b) Capture rate, also called participation rate, is the percentage of the total service area population enrolled at the college.

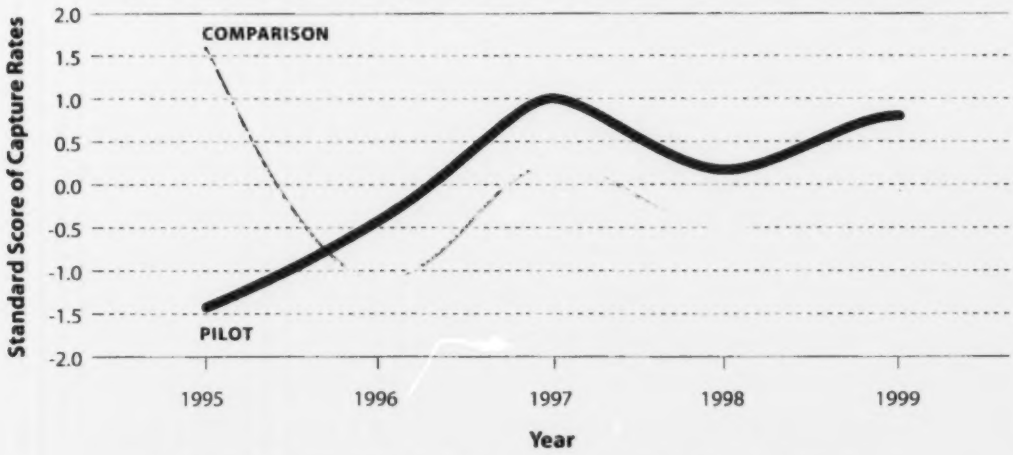
Sources: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (1990-1999). Washington, D.C. Department of Education; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program 1990-1999 (http://eire.census.gov/popest/data/counties.php).

A similar pattern was evident in capture (or participation) rates, defined as the percentage of the total service area population enrolled for credit at the college (see Table 10). (For example, if a college enrolls 2,000 students and the population of its service area is 100,000, the enrollment rate is 2 percent.) Overall, capture rates increased about 4 percent at the pilot colleges. Colleges in the Northern Plains and Southwest saw the largest increases. Rates at colleges in Appalachia remained unchanged and those at the Southern colleges increased modestly.

A number of factors generally affect college enrollment and capture rates, including the national economy, federal legislation such as welfare reform, student aid, system governance, migration, and demographic change. Were these factors responsible for enrollment patterns at the nine pilot colleges, or were RCCI access efforts responsible for the difference? Asked another way, without RCCI, would enrollment at the Southwestern and Northern Plains colleges have increased as much? And would rates have decreased more at the Appalachian colleges? To begin answering these questions, the assessment team compared enrollment trends at the pilot colleges with those at the nine comparison colleges.

Figure 4 shows 1995-1999 capture rates for RCCI pilot and comparison colleges. Standard scores of the enrollment rates were used to directly compare trends at the two groups of colleges.[19]

Figure 4. Capture Rate Trends, RCCI Pilot and Control Colleges, 1995-1999

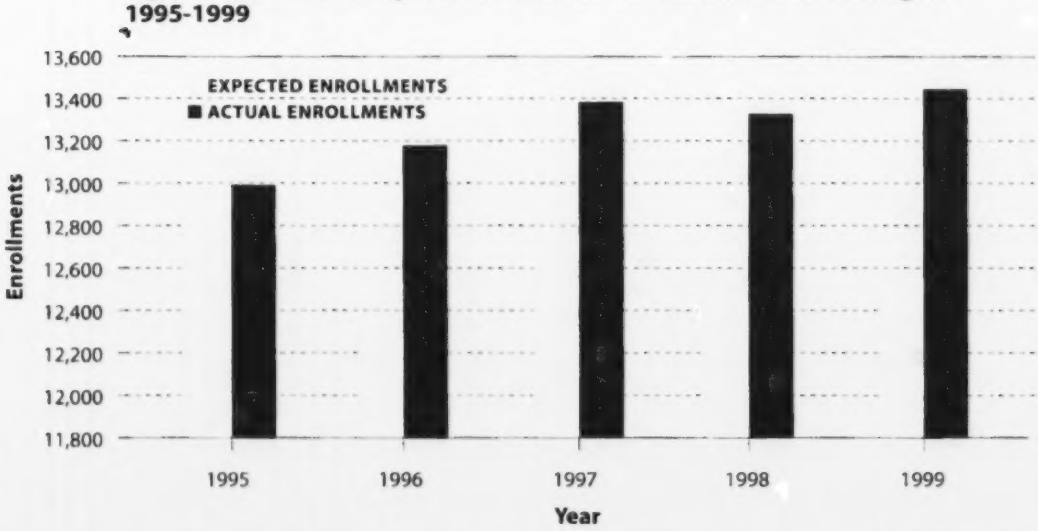


Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 1995–1999, IPEDS, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. U.S. Census Bureau, 1995–1999, Population Estimates Program, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce.

[19] Based on an F test of statistical significance, the difference in the slope of the two trend lines is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level. The mean for each data set was set to zero with a standard deviation of 1.0. As standard scores in Figure 2 show, the RCCI pilot colleges showed a general upward trend in capture rates, while the trend for the control group moved lower.

Figure 5 compares actual and "expected" enrollments at the pilot colleges from 1995 to 1999. Actual enrollments include full-time and part-time students. Expected enrollments represent what the pilot college enrollments would have been had the colleges experienced the same year-over-year trend as the control colleges (i.e., if the pilots had identical year-over-year percent change in enrollment). The graph shows that actual enrollments trended higher for the period but would have trended lower had they followed the same pattern as the control group.[20]

Figure 5. Actual and Expected Enrollments of Nine RCCI Pilot Colleges, 1995-1999



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 1995–1999. Intergrated Postsecondary Education Data Statistics, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

Preliminary evidence from the national assessment indicates that in RCCI communities there is a positive correlation with educational access, as measured by enrollment numbers and capture rates. When compared to a group of control colleges, the RCCI pilots enrolled a greater share of the service area population. The pilots' total enrollment numbers over the study period were higher than they would have been had they followed the pattern experienced by the comparison colleges. Future analysis should examine whether these findings hold true across the four regions or over a longer time period.

[20] Based on a chi-square test of statistical significance, the difference between actual and expected enrollments is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

Economic development

Across the nine pilot college base counties, average unemployment rates fell from 11.6 to 10.5 percent from 1990-1994 to 1995-1999 (Table 11). Using unemployment rates as an indicator, the data suggest that economic conditions in the pilot college communities improved slightly from the period before to the period after RCCI implementation grants were made. Average rates in the Southwest region declined the most, while rates in the Appalachian counties increased by about one-fifth.

Table 11. Average Unemployment and Job Growth Rates, Before and After the Beginning of RCCI

Region	Unemployment rates			Rates of job growth		
	Pre-RCCI (percentage)	Post-RCCI (number)	Percent Change	Pre-RCCI (percentage)	Post-RCCI (percentage)	Change
Appalachia	9.2	11.0	1.8	0.3	1.1	0.8
Delta South	12.2	11.4	-0.8	0.4	-1.1	-1.5
Southwest	13.0	10.7	-2.3	1.8	3.4	1.6
Northern Plains	8.8	8.2	-0.6	1.8	2.7	0.9
Total	11.6	10.5	-1.1	1.0	2.0	1.0

Pre-RCCI is 1990-1994. Post-RCCI is 1995-1999.

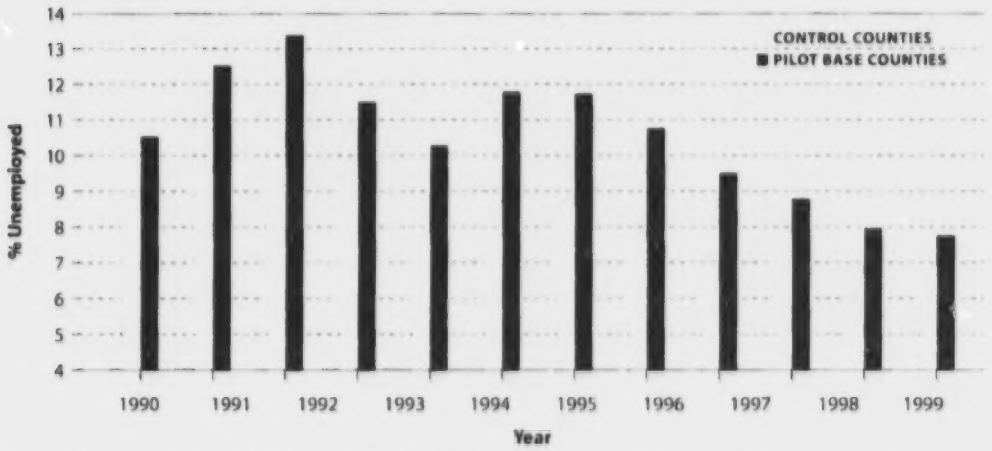
Sources: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (1990-1999). Washington, D.C. Department of Education; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program 1990-1999 (http://eire.census.gov/popest/data/counties.php).

Improvement in economic conditions in the pilot counties is also suggested by a second economic indicator, rate of growth in the number of jobs (Table 11). Across all nine pilot counties, the average rate of job growth for 1990-1994 was 1.0 percent; for 1995-1999, it was 2.0 percent. Jobs increased the fastest in the Southwest region, while counties in the Delta/South saw a decline.

As is the case with college enrollment and capture rates, many economic and demographic factors influence unemployment and job growth. Were these external factors responsible for falling unemployment and the increase in job numbers, or alternatively, were RCCI economic development activities responsible for the improved outlook? To begin answering this question, the assessment team compared economic trends in the pilot college counties with those in counties served by the control colleges.

Unemployment rates in the pilot counties trended downward from 1990 to 2001 but were consistently higher than rates in the control counties throughout the period (Figure 6). Rates in both the pilot and control counties reached a peak in

Figure 6. Unemployment Rates, RCCI Pilot Base Counties and Control Counties, 1990–2001



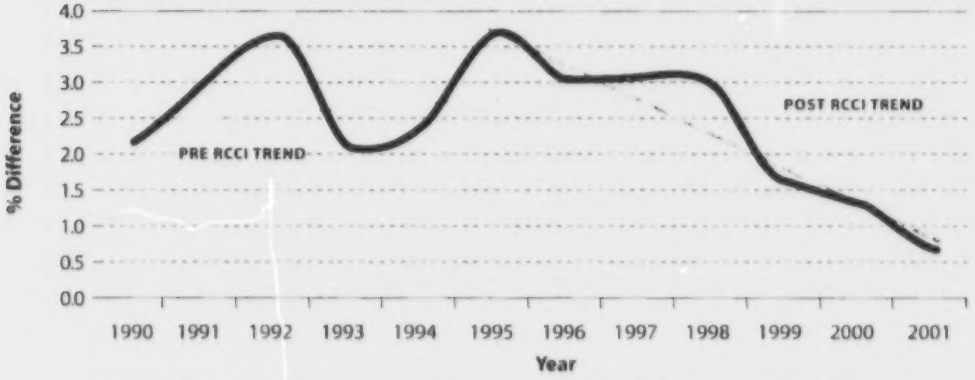
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1990–1999, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Washington, D.C.: Department of Labor.

1992, during the brief national recession, and were lower by 2001, when the economy had improved.[21]

The relationship between rates in the pilot and control counties during the years before and after RCCI's implementation was significantly different. Specifically, during the period 1990-1994, differences between unemployment rates in the pilot and control counties increased slightly. In other words, compared with the control counties, the pilot counties fared less well in the years before RCCI. After RCCI implementation grants were made, however, differences between unemployment rates in the two groups of counties decreased significantly. In 1995, unemployment rates in the pilot counties were more than 3.5 percent higher than in the control counties, but by 2001, the difference was less than 1 percent (Figure 7). Based on this comparison between pilot and control counties, it appears that RCCI activities could have been responsible for some part of the improvement.

[21] Note that in Figures 6-8, the post-RCCI trend is significantly different from the pre-RCCI trend at the 99 percent confidence level.

Figure 7. Unemployment Rate Differences, RCCI Pilot Base Counties and Control Counties, 1990–1999

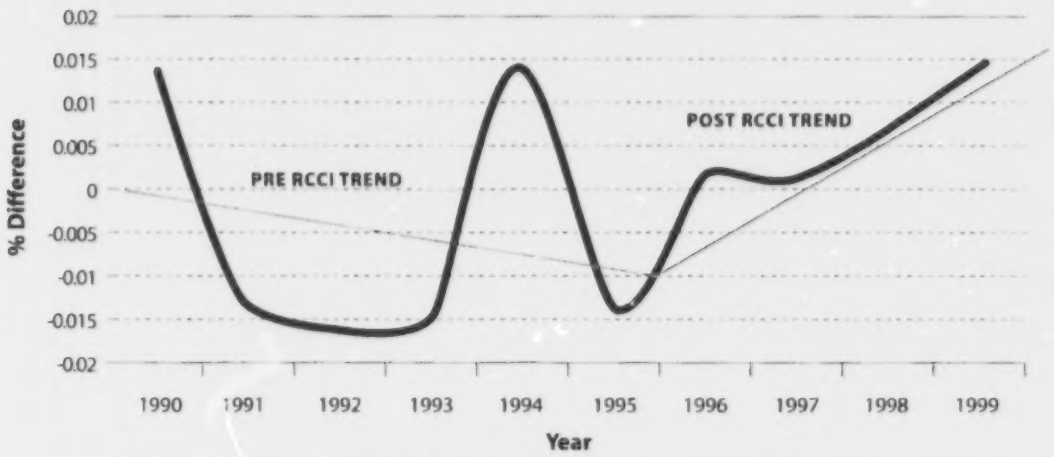


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1990–1999, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Washington, D.C.: Department of Labor.

Similar evidence is shown in Figure 8. Before the implementation grants were made, rates of job growth in the pilot counties were lower than in the control counties. In addition, the pilot counties' position was worsening compared to the control counties. In contrast, after 1995 the pilot counties gained ground as job growth increased at a faster rate than in the control counties.

While further analysis would provide more certainty, preliminary evidence based

Figure 8. Differences in the Rate of Job Growth between RCCI Pilot Base Counties and Control Counties, 1990–1999



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1990–1999, Current Employment Statistics, Washington, D.C.: Department of Labor.

on changes in unemployment and job growth suggests the possibility that RCCI had a positive impact on the economy in pilot college areas.

Most members of the assessment team and several reviewers were at first very skeptical about results of the quantitative analysis. Yet a look at the numbers suggests the findings are not as unlikely as they might seem. The nine pilot base counties have a total workforce of roughly 50,000 people. If unemployment averages 10 percent across the counties, some 5,000 people would be out of work in all, or just over 500 per county. Fifty new jobs added to the economy of a pilot county would translate into a drop in the unemployment rate of 1 percent. Put in these terms, the team's preliminary finding of a positive correlation between RCCI activity and lowered unemployment rates and increased job growth becomes more believable. The Ford Foundation has asked AACC to conduct further analysis through 2006 to understand better what apparently happened in those nine communities to create higher rates of employment and higher levels of job growth.

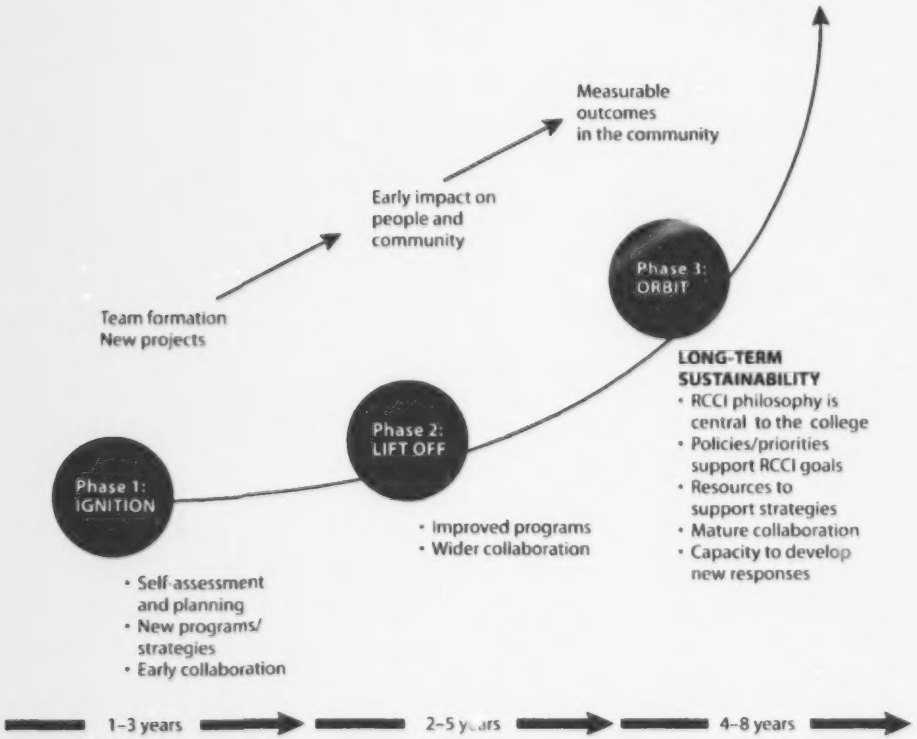
Capacity Building

Numbers like those described above documented one aspect of rural capacity building. New jobs and more people with higher level education were certainly a plus for these distressed communities. Colleges did leverage RCCI funds; in many cases, they used the Ford name and money to attract other funders. There was more to RCCI's impact than the numbers show, however.

Early in the RCCI process, colleges realized they could not become mechanisms for economic growth or improved educational access until they increased their own institutional capacities. RCCI became a generator of institutional change, affecting college organizational structures, leadership styles, and cultures. Some campuses experienced dramatic and obvious change—revising mission statements, reorganizing curriculum and departmental structures, developing new marketing and public relations capacities, and building internal cohesiveness and collegiality. Others expanded upon existing networks and habits of collaboration with enhanced programs but less apparent change in institutional culture. Most campuses increased their capacity to write grants and leverage funds for program development. Colleges improved their ability to conduct institutional research and assessment, and several formalized the V-to-A process across the institution as a strategic planning tool.

In addition to increasing strategic management skills, the RCCI process played a major role in enhancing the human capacities of these rural institutions. The collaborative process and MDC's emphasis upon inclusive team building nurtured leadership among faculty and community partners. It also provided skills and confidence to an emerging tier of secondary leaders. This new leadership capacity—critical to sustainable institutional change and community development—was most evident in the roles of faculty team leaders and project coordinators, many of whom assumed new responsibilities on campus and became part of a national learning network. But the effect of building college-community teams was also to bring community leadership into the campus, providing new ideas and perspectives and challenging old assumptions and practices in higher education. The degree to which the colleges were able to move along the path toward transformation—what MDC called the "swoosh curve" (Figure 9)—often depended upon this interactive leadership.

Figure 9. Moving Toward Long-Term Sustainability of RCCI Efforts



Source: MDC, Inc., August 2000.

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Chapter 9.
What Were the Successes of the Model?

In early 2002, the Ford Foundation and its partners moved from RCCI's initial demonstration phase into a new phase and new relationships between community colleges and land grant universities as a way to promote lasting institutional change and to support the initiative over the longer term. This chapter considers which concepts and intervention strategies held the most promise for this work.

Community Colleges as Change Agents

The RCCI experiment provided a model for institutional change and community revitalization that is transferable to other institutions serving rural communities. For distressed rural populations, however, the community college represents a unique vehicle for this process. In most rural places, the local community colleges provide neutral ground for bringing together diverse local interests. The colleges' services cut across the social structure and provide a place for building dialogue and trust in communities where class and race divisions often run deeply.

Often younger than many other local institutions (such as hospitals, local government, and public schools), community colleges do not carry as much historical and political baggage as older organizations in a community. Community colleges, as community-based institutions, are generally less susceptible to private funding cycles and popular trends. Although they may be connected to state and national education structures, community colleges are locally "owned" institutions whose missions are to respond to the needs of their local service areas.

As local institutions whose survival is not solely dependent on grant funds, community colleges can focus on building networks and partnerships for the good of their communities. Tribal colleges and universities have different funding structures, but they too develop long-term relationships with local business leaders, school administrators, teachers, and other officials. Nearly all 24 RCCI colleges supported new branch campuses or telecommunications facilities in outlying rural districts, and they saw this as a way to extend their reach to large geographic areas.

The comprehensive mission of community colleges brings a unique strength to their potential role in community development. Their multiple educational goals

involve staff in local health care, public education, businesses, and other organizations, and their faculty provide a broad-based pool of expertise to tackle large tasks addressing a variety of needs. In addition to providing a fertile environment for creativity and local leadership development, the colleges provide visible role models for local youth and build confidence in educational achievement for young people and adults through pre-college courses, GED programs, and family learning experiences. Community colleges have the potential to help individuals and their communities thrive through effective use of information, knowledge, and local assets.

It is not a stretch to say, as has Vaughn Grisham, director of the McLean Institute for Community Development at the University of Mississippi, that community colleges are "the key to rural development. Community and economic development is not easy. It is not rocket science, but it is extremely complex... [consistently] doing 100 percent of things right."[22] Community colleges have an important role to play in stopping job erosion in rural communities.

Given time, resources, and guidance, community colleges in distressed areas can become places for innovation and community change. For RCCI institutions, the transformation process has just begun. Some have made significant progress in redefining institutional missions, culture, and structures. Others are still in the process of discovering new potential and overcoming old barriers. The communities they serve have farther to go before they are empowered to shape their own future. Past interventions in these communities provided temporary hope but only passing commitment to sustaining change. RCCI has begun the process in some of the most distressed communities of rural America.

Environment for Learning and Change

Many poor rural communities have long been recipients of short-term, project-oriented investments by philanthropic and government organizations. The assessment team concluded that RCCI represented a different kind of investment in that it set the stage for more lasting and fundamental change. How did that occur? As shown in Table 6, it gave participants many opportunities to learn by traveling, exchanging experiences and ideas, and working with coaches and other experts. By expanding what sociologists call a cultural "tool kit," it created a true environment for learning and change.[23]

[22] Vaughn Grisham, plenary remarks at the first national conference of the Rural Community College Alliance, Memphis, Tenn., October 7, 2002.

[23] See, for example, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," by Ann Swidler in *American Sociological Review*, 1986, Vol. 51: 273-286. See also *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*, by Cynthia M. Duncan, Yale University Press, 1999, Chap. 4.

- ***Field trips.*** The Project GRAD K-12 school reform site visit to Newark, New Jersey, in 2001 is a good example of how RCCI encouraged learning and built a bigger tool kit on which people could draw. Nine colleges sent representatives on the trip. MDC covered all expenses for one person from each college and travel costs for a second. Of the 31 travelers, nine were members of a core RCCI team back home. The rest were from public school systems or from the colleges themselves. MDC sent two staff members and a consultant who had worked with several RCCI teams on educational access issues. The group toured two elementary schools and a high school. For many, it was the first experience in an inner-city school—a "truly eye opening day" and a "shot in the arm," as two people reported. They were full of questions, always curious, talking among themselves about comparisons with their own communities. On the last day in a debriefing session, they considered why they were in this line of work, what they were already doing to improve their schools, and which elements of the urban model could be tried back home.

  Meridian Community College sent a team of five people to Newark. One was a longtime RCCI team member and the others were from the county and city school districts. They used the trip to solidify their partnership, make definite plans to move forward, and share ideas with others on the trip. Mountain Empire Community College, which up until then had focused more on economic development than access, sent six people. The group was well suited to begin building a stronger partnership and launch a new phase of RCCI work. They found Newark "a safe place to talk about these difficult issues...an answer to our prayers."[24]

  Interviews conducted during the assessment indicated that RCCI participants greatly valued opportunities like these to experience new places, ideas, and strategies. This environment helped people apply new ideas in their own communities and reduced their sense of being alone. While some individuals were at first wary or fearful of the "required" travel, networking, and site visits, they came to appreciate them as the initiative developed. People who thought their community's problems were unique discovered other places with similar challenges. They learned how to think together—to think bigger than they had before—and to recognize potential solutions

[24] Personal conversation, RCCI participant and researcher, 2001.

developed by strangers in another part of the country. Some Appalachians and American Indians, for example, discovered they were kindred spirits whose communities had similar economic histories, and they forged personal bonds that helped their respective community members see new possibilities. Simple conversations reduced isolation, energized team members, and contributed to accelerated learning.

- ***National institutes.*** Nearly all national institutes were held on an RCCI campus. This made for inconvenient travel—the RCCI rural communities were a quick flight from almost nowhere—but effective learning. MDC encouraged participants to make the most of the time needed to get to a national institute, arranging group travel and carpools that served as get-to-know-you sessions even among team members from the same community. Shared rides at an institute were comfortable venues for people from different communities to conduct their own informal Q&A sessions. Host colleges incorporated local cultural events into the two- or three-day programs at each institute. This allowed the hosts to introduce RCCI members to the heart of their communities. Again, cultural context was valued as an integral part of planning and community development.

  Assessment interviews and the national survey indicated a widespread view that the institutes were a forum for sharing the central principles and assumptions of RCCI—most especially the value of inclusion and collaboration. They also provided opportunities for campus and community members to get to know one another and to start thinking about collaboration in new ways. There were many "aha" moments at these gatherings, ranging from one college deciding to adapt another's ideas for a scholarship program to a realization of common ground between Kentucky hill people and Indians living on reservations.

- ***Exposure.*** Field trips and institutes were obvious examples of how RCCI provided exposure to new ideas. As teams matured and projects expanded, field trips to model programs and access to experts through the technical assistance pool became more important to local success. Some colleges developed strong relationships with MDC coaches, and almost everywhere the coaches served as an outside stimulus, pushing RCCI teams to think broadly and creatively and to take risks they ordinarily would not have attempted.

For both faculty and community team members, RCCI provided positive experiences that reinforced fundamental values of civic life: collaboration, inclusiveness, strategic thinking, confidence, and working for the greater good. The participation of the mayor on one RCCI team validated the idea that RCCI was about something bigger than one college. Community-focused projects provided team members with a positive sense of accomplishment and further incentive for innovation. The multicultural dimension of the national experiment—and especially the cross-cultural learning at RCCI institutes—reinforced local pride and strengthened local confidence in community assets. Although many of the RCCI teams were not sufficiently inclusive and failed to include members from the extremes of the social structure, they did bring together individuals from diverse organizations, communities, and backgrounds who had not worked with one another before. Above all, RCCI nurtured a vision of new possibilities and provided a web of experiences that encouraged confidence, creativity, and community.

Third-Party Management

As the third-party manager, MDC built a national learning network that was crucial to the forward movement of the RCCI teams. MDC challenged the colleges to think strategically, learn from each other, and strengthen collaborations with a wide range of local and national institutions. Using the intervention strategies described in Chapter 6, MDC pressed the colleges to broaden their thinking, to expand their leadership base, and to develop deeper collaborations across their communities. An administrator from Mountain Empire, for example, noted that before RCCI they did not know who was not at the table.

RCCI's structured process of guided intervention encouraged self-assessment, raised expectations, facilitated shared learning, stimulated innovation, and created an environment where new ideas could grow. The presence of a third-party managing partner was essential to this process.

MDC guided the colleges through an evolutionary process consisting of three stages: self-assessment and planning; trying, failing, and trying again; and sharing and growing. Each is discussed below.

- ***Self-assessment and planning.*** In the first stage, MDC's Vision to Action process helped the college/community teams recognize their problems and understand their dreams. MDC provided structure for self-reflection and environmental scanning and assured that all voices—or as many as possible—would be heard. MDC functioned as a neutral outsider, helping teams to negotiate old turf and institutional boundaries and to begin thinking beyond traditional definitions of access and economic development. Team building at the RCCI sites was part of this process. When the third-party manager was not very involved, and when college leadership changed, the institution slipped and made less progress.

  Although many of the RCCI colleges initially resisted the V-to-A strategic planning process, most changed their minds after attending the national institutes and learning from other communities. To varying degrees, coaches pushed college teams to be more creative and to see their communities in a different light. In most cases, consultants were available to suggest new approaches to old problems. The experience of being part of a national network gave RCCI team members confidence to take risks. While MDC developed increasingly effective intervention strategies as the demonstration initiative progressed, it consistently played a central role in motivating colleges to reach beyond traditional boundaries.

- ***Trying, failing, and trying again.*** During the second stage, the RCCI implementation stage, colleges began to develop their own expertise through trial and error. Coaching led to technical assistance and colleges learned how to sell themselves to their communities, how to reassess their vision when things do not go as planned, and how to use outside expertise effectively. At this stage colleges began to design community development strategies that were tailored to local circumstances, such as an aquaculture project housed in an abandoned coal mine, and tweaked them time and again in search of success.

- ***Sharing and growing.*** By the third stage, colleges began to develop confidence in their own expertise at home and away. As time went on, some RCCI teams developed their skills enough to see their assigned coaches more as colleagues than outside experts. The managing partner became a facilitator to help colleges share their expertise with each other. Members of RCCI teams became presenters at the leadership institutes. At the end of this stage,

colleges had gained enough capacity to start serving as their own "third-party managers" of local projects, empowering others in their community to address pressing needs. Two excellent examples were the roles that Salish Kootenai College and Southeastern Community College played as leaders in master planning efforts for major new economic development ventures in their communities.

At first, the colleges viewed this third-party intervention strategy as a series of annoying activities that stood between them and Ford funding. Some presidents wished all the funds had gone directly to the colleges; they were perfectly happy doing their own thing. But as relationships began to build among the partners, the intervention strategies became a central component of RCCI. In some cases, they also became central components of a college's regular planning process. Hazard Community College took the Vision to Action process campus-wide, using it as the structure for faculty/staff retreats and college-wide planning. Next to the Ford grants, most of the colleges came to view the intervention activities as essential to the RCCI experience, even though they neither interpreted nor used them in the same ways.

Most important, third-party management helped colleges think about their starting places (where they were as institutions and community leaders), begin documenting their baseline positions, and move toward transformation. They learned to benchmark their progress along the way.

Salish Kootenai College offers a good example. Through RCCI, the college worked with Ktuxaxa Community Development Corporation (KCDC) in Elmo, Montana, to make a reality a reservation-wide master plan that now includes local, regional, and state entities. This was no small accomplishment for the Kootenai people, who had started with almost nothing just a few years earlier. As a result, KCDC received nearly $2 million in grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for business development and community building. Because of their RCCI experience, Elmo community members learned to look to each other's expertise—and for future funding—to address the continuing economic needs and vitality of the Kootenai people. RCCI team leaders say that none of this would have been possible without the outside expertise provided by RCCI coaches and third-party facilitator training.

Other Successes

- ***Widely shared vision and team approach.*** RCCI energized the colleges with a common set of values and assumptions about change. The vision outlined in the RCCI conceptual framework gave the colleges something to shoot for. After an uneven start with the pilots, most colleges bought into the team concept. While team composition and responsibilities varied with local context and leadership styles, the process of collaborating with a team of community representatives for the purpose of strategic planning generated enthusiasm, energy, and creativity across the sites. People in the community saw it happen and participated in the process. One local person said it this way: "Before RCCI the college was always in the community but not contributing to the community."[25] It was in it but not of it.

- ***Strategic planning.*** The Vision to Action process conducted with each team in each community taught facilitation skills, built local confidence, and helped local people develop a shared vision for their community. V-to-A helped provide focus among a plethora of community needs as well as a strategic process to manage change. The RCCI institutes and the V-to-A process provided a common space for learning, developing leaders, and comparing local progress with that of other communities. Some institutions used V-to-A primarily as a way to assess institutional capacity and build internal relationships; others leapt directly into program development and community outreach activities.

- ***Attention to culture and diversity.*** The RCCI philosophy and many of its intervention strategies fostered a climate that encouraged cross-cultural understanding. This understanding became a cornerstone of the colleges' RCCI experience. The networking opportunities provided by the institutes encouraged local pride and fostered racial and cross-cultural understanding. Lakota dancers and southern Gospel choirs garnered equal respect at RCCI events. People who had never been out of their home community enjoyed accents and politics from far-away places. And diversity meant more than race and culture. Other kinds of biases and hierarchies between center and periphery became apparent as peers became leaders. This too was part of confidence building and cross-cultural understanding.

[25] Site visit interview.

- ***Flexible funding.*** In the assessment interviews, many people from RCCI colleges told how they appreciated that they could direct their grant funds toward things that met their local needs as long as they related to the RCCI goals. Some mentioned how the Ford Foundation's flexibility in RCCI's funding structure was key to working within the constraints of state systems and the internal politics of their institutions. That flexibility allowed colleges to focus on process rather than product to meet RCCI goals. Even those colleges who were coached by MDC to reach beyond a project orientation argued it was the funding process that allowed them to think in terms of building relationships—even if those relationships had not yet moved beyond the project at hand. Capacity building and leadership development were enhanced by the ability to use unrestricted funds in creative ways. This expanded old notions of access and development. It also created new partnerships. Lack of money, always an issue in any community, is a special barrier for poor communities. The RCCI funds granted to each college, which were not immense by national standards, had a tremendous influence on the creation of new programs that addressed specific local issues.

Chapter 10. Circumstances That Affected Success

Despite similarities related to poverty and difficult economic conditions, specific characteristics of the college, community, and policy environment differed across the 24 RCCI sites. From among these very different circumstances, the assessment team found six major factors that influenced the degree of success in the demonstration phase of the RCCI national initiative. They were:

- Leadership
- Commitment
- Local context
- State policy
- K-12 relationships
- College capacity

Leadership

RCCI was more successful in achieving its goals when college and community leadership was strong and inclusive. In some cases, strong leadership was already present at the beginning of the college's involvement with RCCI. More often, it was strengthened and made more inclusive through the initiative.

Central to the RCCI process of building community capacity for development was the nurturing of new leaders and leadership styles. This leadership development involved bringing new people to the table through collaboration and teamwork, encouraging a more inclusive decision-making process, and "stretching" leaders by moving them into organizations and capacities outside their normal comfort zone. Sometimes this outreach meant the president joined the local Rotary Club, Lions Club, or chamber of commerce for the first time, meeting other community leaders as equals. Some of these distressed rural areas had little experience with collaborative approaches to community leadership, since the economy and power structure was not conducive to risktaking. Most formal institutions and political relationships (except perhaps in tribal communities) usually followed more hierarchical models that did not encourage the creation of inclusive teams of college-community decision-makers. RCCI helped change this environment. An RCCI team in southwest Virginia, for example, included editors from three

different newspapers who became strong public advocates for collaborative ventures between the community and the college.

- ***Presidential leadership style.*** RCCI facilitated the expansion of leadership capacities essential to creativity and sustainable change. Although presidential leadership styles differed markedly among the colleges, as a rule RCCI presidents became more visible in local business and economic development organizations in their communities, and second-tier leadership at the institutions was broadened and strengthened. The inclusion of the presidents on the campus team gave local credibility to the initiative, and the special attention given to the presidents by Ford, including the separate national policy discussions at workshop meetings, bonded them to the larger goals of RCCI. Presidential leadership affected the success of the Vision to Action process, the breadth of RCCI projects, and in the inclusiveness and independence of teams.

  Presidents who already had or who adopted a more collaborative decision-making style and a commitment to long-term community development generally produced larger, more enthusiastic teams and more varied projects than directive presidents who followed a more assertive, short-term management strategy of "ready, fire, aim." Continuity in presidential and team leadership proved to be an important asset in sustaining new RCCI relationships. Continuity also helped maintain a commitment to RCCI as a process of change rather than as simply another funded project. Presidents who were perceived to be interested more in a legacy than in the community made it difficult to achieve RCCI goals based on inclusion. It is unlikely that a president would characterize his or her own style as autocratic even when that perception was held by others. More often, the leader thought other ideas were not needed or would slow down progress toward a pre-RCCI goal that was viewed as more important than a goal "imposed" by RCCI. If the goal and direction were already set, what was the use of collaborative decision-making? In a few cases a leader did not appear to foster a shared decision-making culture or to be proactive in promoting cross-cultural or cross-racial engagement. RCCI did not take hold under these conditions.

- ***Leadership turnover.*** Turnover was a problem that proved difficult to overcome. Of the 24 RCCI colleges, 14 had steady presidential leadership

from beginning to end of the RCCI work. Nine presidents took over after RCCI began. (One of the nine was gone only briefly during the time that RCCI was established.) Only two colleges experienced repeated turnover, one a pilot and the other an expansion site. Instability at the presidential level made it difficult to achieve success with RCCI, although presidents from other colleges in at least two instances helped new presidents get up to speed. Colleges with just one change in presidency came through a turnover in better shape, thanks largely to strong team leaders. They made an enormous difference. Team leaders at Meridian and Southeastern, for example, ensured that the RCCI momentum continued steadily despite a change in president. Those incoming presidents welcomed the expertise and experience of the RCCI team leaders.

- ***Secondary and tertiary leadership.*** The emergence of strong secondary and tertiary leadership at many colleges added to the capacity for success. RCCI provided an opportunity to tap into the knowledge and skills in human resources already available to the colleges; i.e., faculty and community members. The collaborative context of RCCI nurtured existing skills such as community building, fundraising, mediation, and knowledge of local networks. At the same time, a collaborative environment nurtured the development of knowledge, confidence, and professional skills among a new cadre of potential leaders. When the college president encouraged the emergence of second- and third-tier leaders in the team, they helped widen the RCCI circle of civic entrepreneurs, inside and outside the colleges, who could share their commitment and enthusiasm for change with others.

Commitment

RCCI was more likely to succeed in achieving its goals when members of the college and community were committed to a common good beyond institutional or personal reward. Presidents and team leaders with roots in the community they served were sometimes quicker to internalize the RCCI process as an effective tool for community revitalization. It was "their" community. With an understanding of the local history, culture, and power relationships, such leaders could become critical links between the more formal structures of the college and the more informal networks of the community.

- ***Common good.*** Leaders who openly demonstrated their commitment to the common good, and to the transformational goals of RCCI, freed their teams to think broadly and to take risks in project development that sometimes seemed impossible and often carried them into unfamiliar terrain. RCCI helped break down established institutional customs and local political boundaries. At the personal level, some RCCI team members reported newfound confidence from being thrust into situations that might not be considered "risky" by others—such as facilitating a meeting or even getting into a taxi driven by a stranger in an unknown city. RCCI provided a forum for those who believed in the common good to convene. When asked how they had managed to overcome traditional county rivalries, one Hazard team member responded: "No one here cares about county lines."[26]

- ***Team composition and continuity.*** RCCI encouraged, even demanded, colleges to develop inclusive teams representative of all parts of their communities. RCCI was most effective in places were teams were strong. Getting the team right was sometimes a challenge, however. Colleges found that even when they thought their teams were fully inclusive, they were not. Teambuilding was a continual proactive exercise, not just saying yes to those who inquired about joining for a moment or a year. No part of this process was easy, and it should not be undervalued.

  The absence of long-term commitment among some RCCI team members was a problem. Some teams struggled to maintain continuity and a high interest among members. People came and went in some cases, and remaining team members continually had to orient newcomers. Some colleges talked about people "getting tired." College resources were sometimes spread thinly, either because of the time required or simply because there were not enough people to implement all the good new ideas. A participant from Salish Kootenai College summed it up this way:

  > *"Our challenge is always funding for staff. Each time we take a giant step forward with a new program we come up with another new idea. What happens for us is that the resources are spread so thin that there is no time to write grants, much less find the sources… burnout of talented, dedicated and engaged staff is a significant concern."*[27]

[26] Site visit interview.
[27] Site visit interview.

This situation is not uncommon in rural community colleges, where too many people wear too many hats. New grant-funded initiatives bring real energy and excitement, but because often no one is nearby to pick up the routine functions, people have more responsibilities than they can handle. RCCI colleges struggled to find ways to cope with these challenges.

- ***National network.*** Ironically, the national network established by RCCI also helped sustain and broaden a commitment to local change. Institutes, workshops, consultants, and coaches regularly focused team members' attention on transformational goals, and participants took pride in being part of a national movement. The environment at the institutes encouraged collegiality and in some ways served as a catalyst for individual colleges. For colleges hosting a meeting, the event showcased local pride. Some teams sent different community members to each national institute as a way of rewarding participation, widening the circle of leadership, and deepening commitment. At the institutes and on field trips, communities learned from one another and returned home energized. One participant noted with awe how the first institute "opened our eyes." Others admitted they liked how the meetings gave them a chance to "show their stuff," even to appear to be the best. A team leader reported going to each institute with the specific goal of finding at least one new idea that would help the college do something better. A healthy competition evolved among the participating colleges to demonstrate progress and share new benchmarks of success. The 24 RCCI colleges formed a small enough cohort to learn from each other and to sustain commitment to the collective goals of the initiative. The flexibility of the Ford funds allowed them to leverage resources for a variety of local projects, while sustaining commitment to community objectives.

- ***Campus involvement.*** An effort like RCCI requires people who can make things happen. When relatively few people on campus were part of the official or informal RCCI team, the goals were harder to achieve. One RCCI team member explained it this way:

  "The most significant challenge continues to be the integration of RCCI philosophy into the college. Our best approach in dealing with this has been to recruit more college faculty members into RCCI activities."[28]

[28] Site visit interview.

A collaboration between RCCI team members at this college and a regional writing project attempted to broaden the initiative's impact. At another college, a team member said that most faculty on campus didn't understand RCCI well enough to value the college president's commitment to the community. They thought his time should not have been diverted from academic issues. In one region, the assessment team concluded that the weakest element of institutional change was among the faculty. Partly because the RCCI program was usually located (fiscally and physically) in development and outreach divisions of the colleges, most faculty could ignore much of what went on. Individual members obviously became very active—such as the professor at Southeast who served as RCCI team leader and managed the RCCI e-mail subscription list—but as a group the traditional academic departments of the colleges remained distant from the RCCI action.

Competition between academic programs and continuing education, technical training, and outreach programs is not uncommon at postsecondary institutions. The RCCI structure did not work to overcome this separation despite efforts to recruit faculty to join the team. This may have resulted from Ford and MDC's outspoken emphasis on the need to engage community members so that RCCI was not just a "college thing." The absence of more faculty participation was not surprising since RCCI did not feature much attention to curriculum issues geared directly to their classrooms. Given limitations of resources, it is hard to say whether more attention should have been spent in that area.

With as much emphasis as RCCI placed on community involvement and community development, it is not surprising that RCCI did not reach deeper into the faculty and staff levels in most of the colleges. This failure, if it was a failure, was noted by the assessment team. The team attributed it largely to the relative scarcity of personnel in rural community colleges in general, and to these disadvantaged communities in particular. Wearing many hats meant that most people had too many responsibilities. It was probably constraints of time as much as anything that prevented them from reaching into faculty ranks. There were exceptions, of course, but in a "what if?" discussion, the assessment team wondered what more might have been accomplished at the curriculum level if RCCI had touched more instructors.

Local Context

A key feature of RCCI was the importance it placed on local context, culture, and traditions. Every community was different, and that diversity was perceived by everyone to be a good thing, something to validate and celebrate. By providing flexible funding for locally defined projects, RCCI avoided the one-size-fits-all, hierarchical strategies that have historically characterized national rural programs. Despite conventional wisdom, RCCI reinforced the idea that the rural circumstance is not simple and not just about residence. RCCI said place is important—and complex. It is about a history of relationships, values, and cultures that shaped diverse experiences across a rural landscape. RCCI offered the respect and understanding of those experiences that was key to successful community development. The respect was illustrated in two ways. First, many of the RCCI college teams were led by individuals who had left the rural community and chose to return. Their dedication to the community and the college was evident in how they described the work and how they could contribute to developing the community. Second, when colleges were able to redefine their roles within the context and culture of their local communities, RCCI was much more likely to achieve its goals. A good example was Laredo Community College, where RCCI work helped stimulate planning for a second campus that would be much more accessible to the people in the colonias.

Not all colleges redefined their roles as significantly as Laredo, but most did recognize and map their community's assets—not just the deficits—and built bridges of collaboration based on those assets. Local businesses, non-profit organizations, families, customs, school systems, and other assets were necessary for building new economies. RCCI included institutions and communities that were vastly diverse in both type and place on the continuum. They differed in their skills in mapping assets, forging collaborative partnerships, and contributing to real economic change.

- ***Culture.*** From the first days of RCCI planning, MDC and Ford validated the importance of local culture and embedded it into the demonstration program. It became in effect the signature characteristic of RCCI. Although every college brought its own culture to RCCI, nowhere was culture more visible than in the tribal colleges and universities. RCCI rather emphatically "allowed" these colleges to utilize traditional Indian

ways of knowing and learning to bring about economic development on the reservations. Participation in the RCCI experiment empowered them to use traditional Indian circular and consensus approaches to decision-making and program development instead of relying solely on the hierarchical higher education model demanded by external accrediting and funding agents.

The RCCI interrelated approach to community collaboration, team leadership, and team structure allowed tribal colleges to play a stronger role in community development and to increase enrollments precisely because they were responsive to their local context. The influence of the tribal colleges on other RCCI teams cannot be underestimated as people from non-reservation communities came to appreciate the consensus approach that came so naturally to the Indians.

- ***History.*** The most successful strategies developed through RCCI were flexible enough to meet local need, and sustainable enough to survive in the face of outside governance, market, and cultural forces. Just like the communities they serve, the colleges differed according to their history, governance, and resources. They also differed in their capacity to engage in outreach. Some institutions needed to focus strategic planning efforts on strengthening internal relationships and leadership skills first, before attempting to serve as a link for external community assets. Others, such as Southeast Community College in Kentucky and Southeastern Community College in North Carolina, were ready to function as a catalyst for community building but needed to make internal adjustments necessary to lead community change. Each college needed to begin at its own starting point, taking into account history, culture, attitudes, and awareness of possibilities. RCCI helped the colleges find their own spot on the continuum and then move forward from there.

  Vision to Action was a catalytic starting point for Coahoma Community College, an institution with few resources. V-to-A strengthened its campus leadership and built the confidence, professional skills, cohesiveness, and collegiality needed before the college could address the larger RCCI agenda. Coahoma may not have developed elaborate and extensive community projects, but it probably advanced farther as an institution than any other in terms of its capacity to bring about local change.

- ***Local politics and economic circumstances.*** Like any community, rural communities have their share of local politics. An obvious difference in small, isolated rural communities is that proportionately more citizens know the political leaders personally. For better or worse, they may share a long history together. In some RCCI communities, the shared history was the biggest problem. "We've never done it that way," was a common refrain. Past and present racial strife, ideas about keeping some people "in their place," and even attitudes about who deserved an education were sometimes serious barriers to implementing RCCI goals of inclusion and participation. The racial, class, and economic polarization of many of the RCCI communities was an outgrowth of years of distrust and one-sided power structures. All of this was compounded by the generally dire circumstances of the local and regional economies that the RCCI colleges served. These communities faced severe problems of high unemployment, low levels of human capital, and limited social infrastructure.

State Policy

Community colleges, creatures of state policy, depend on the vagaries and politics of state funding formulas and budget changes. In 2000, a member of the Coahoma team explained it this way:

> *"Mississippi has encountered severe reductions in the community college system this year...this has made it difficult to accomplish the goals previously set . . . . basic essentials like maintaining a full staff load are becoming increasingly difficult."*[29]

By 2003 people in most states could say much the same thing.

Another kind of policy might be termed "competition for status." For example, Somerset wanted to create a one-stop center for a welfare-to-work program, but state policy restricted one-stop centers from providing training. Agencies with a one-stop designation were referral sites. Somerset could not provide both the referral service and training, yet training is what community colleges were primed to do. The college's hands were tied as the one-stop designation went to another entity that referred welfare recipients to training sites, presumably including the college. It was not uncommon to see political bickering between community

[29] Site visit interview.

colleges and other state agencies wanting to be the official "designee." Somerset was not unique. This was a problem in other states, too.

On the positive side, the RCCI colleges gained a much broader and more progressive view of access and economic development than they had in the past. They learned to see access, for example, as working with K-12 schools to make sure high school graduates were ready for college. They viewed economic development with a decided focus on equity. Unfortunately, state policymakers tended to be conservative in how they interpreted these issues and the colleges' role in addressing them, and fund them (or not) accordingly. As one community member put it, state lawmakers were sick of "pouring money into the mountains." The political climate of welfare reform nationally seemed to indicate a reluctance to distribute resources from more affluent parts of the country into poorer areas with fewer people. State and federal policymakers then and now tend to base their funding strategies on areas where there is a critical mass; i.e., not rural communities.

K-12 Relationships

The nature of the community college relationship with its local K-12 schools affected some of the RCCI work. Some of the RCCI colleges were stymied by the weakness of the local educational system and were reluctant to broach what seemed to be an unsurmountable, labor-intensive problem. Until the quality of K-12 education improved, it was nearly impossible to think about access. The community college open door could open only so far. Additionally, outreach efforts by some colleges were met with community resistance when it came to educating immigrants or people whose families had never placed a high value on education. High illiteracy rates challenged progressive thinking in some regions. These issues are debated in community colleges across the United States, but the severely disadvantaged rural communities of RCCI felt them strongly.

Successful and positive relationships paid off dramatically. Meridian's MathFirst initiative in the local schools (a kind of "math will steer your future" approach) worked well because of strong partnerships and community buy-in. By all accounts Laredo's *Familias Pueden* had a dramatic impact on the first-graders and their families who built lasting relationships with the college. The good news is that this was a strategy that seemed to work amazingly well. The bad news is that

personal, "high-touch" programs are expensive. In the midst of tough financial times, teacher shortages, and growing K-12 enrollments, educators and policymakers must make hard and perhaps no-win decisions.

College Capacity

The internal and external resources available to each college directly influenced its capacity for change. In many ways, there was little difference between pilot and expansion colleges in this regard except for the opportunity to maximize those resources over time. Most ended the demonstration phase of RCCI with good ideas, new ways of thinking, and continuing capacity issues. One college's ability to capitalize on fundraising and leveraging grants that could help sustain its RCCI efforts was the result of housing RCCI in the development office and making the development officer the RCCI team leader. No other college took that approach, and the success seen at one college may have been situational. When college infrastructures were weak, they sometimes could not take immediate advantage of the learning opportunities offered by RCCI. Tribal colleges faced huge challenges and at the beginning of RCCI were at the survival level. Most of their staff time was spent on fundraising and continuing to meet accreditation requirements. The long-term effect of RCCI on tribal colleges and universities depends on whether those that were part of RCCI can serve as models for others in rethinking higher education and its role in American Indian community and economic development.

Synergy Between Goals: Community Development

As noted in Chapter 3, a critical assumption in RCCI's conceptual framework was that economic development and educational access were related and mutually reinforcing. A guiding assumption of RCCI planners was that work in both areas together would produce an impact greater than work in either one alone. RCCI was not only about a two-pronged access and economic development focus, but also about some kind of synergy between the two.

Did RCCI achieve synergy between its development and access goals? The assessment team's general conclusion was that not enough time has passed for synergy between development and access to occur. It would take more time, perhaps decades, for the supply of and demand for skilled, educated workers to improve enough to reinforce each other.

Nevertheless, what can be said is that when a college achieved any one of the three RCCI goals (access, economic development and capacity building), it stood a *better chance* of achieving the others. What mattered is that the college started with the goal that was right for the community.

It can also be said that by addressing economic development, access, and institutional capacity simultaneously, RCCI created a circular or holistic model of community development that did not separate education from wealth creation or compartmentalize the contributions of teachers and economic development experts. Over time, RCCI colleges came to understand the relationship between access to higher education and economic development, adopting a new definition of access after they had explored economic development options. This realization helped them to reexamine their role in community development.

For a holistic model of community development to be successful in overcoming barriers to opportunity in poor communities, community colleges must be encouraged to explore further their own missions and to move beyond conventional measures of institutional success. National higher education culture and state policies have not changed despite RCCI, and systemic barriers abound for colleges taking on new roles as agents of community development. If they are to sustain change, colleges must seek additional resources and validation outside of traditional indicators of success (graduation rates, enrollments, etc.). Connections to the Ford Foundation, RCCI network, and their communities provided that validation and linked the colleges to the wider community college and community development movements.

To begin to think beyond traditional notions about educational access and service, RCCI colleges had to envision themselves as community development partners. Without this shift, rural community colleges risk remaining outposts of mainstream higher education. RCCI provided validation to individual faculty who served their communities. In some cases, that brought a newfound respect for outreach to local civic groups that had otherwise been avoided. Often, as at Prestonsburg Community College, citizen membership on the RCCI team triggered closer relationships between the college and the community. RCCI provided a valuable "space" in which the community development role of community colleges could mature.

Change

That long-term change takes time is no surprise. It is clear that the colleges who participated in RCCI for a longer period of time (the pilots) were able to accomplish more and create more sustainable programs. The difference was mitigated by the fact that by the time the expansions came along, MDC's intervention strategies were more fully formed. Lessons had been learned from the pilots and a culture of peer learning had become entrenched. Some colleges made significant progress in redefining institutional missions, culture, and structures. Others were still in the process of discovering new potential and overcoming old barriers. However, many RCCI access and economic development projects have not yet fully challenged the status quo in their communities.

Part IV. Conclusion

Chapter 11. Summary of Findings

The RCCI demonstration colleges are located in some of the nation's poorest places. They serve areas with higher poverty rates, lower education levels, and more unemployment than in the rest of rural America and the nation as a whole.

Staff from the Ford Foundation and MDC who originally conceived of RCCI believed that in poor communities like these, the local college could be a critical institution, given the right combination of resources. To test whether this assumption was valid, and what kind of resources were required to make it so, RCCI built new partnerships, adopted an integrated and bottom-up view of community development, encouraged accelerated learning, and provided flexible funding. The initiative emphasized collaboration, diversity, and local decision-making while charging community colleges to make a solid link between their access and economic development efforts. Responding differently depending on where they started and what their circumstances were, the RCCI colleges nevertheless became catalysts for change in the local communities.

Collaboration

Ford's Community Asset Building Division joined its Education Division to fund RCCI, symbolizing not only collaboration across divisions within the foundation but also a more integrated view of community development that linked economic development with access to higher education. Rather than investing solely in direct grants for individual college projects, the foundation opted to contract with a third-party managing partner. In that role, MDC guided the national effort and advised the colleges on strategic planning and project implementation. Ford and MDC chose not to impose a particular set of programs or strategies to solve regional problems. Instead, colleges were expected to identify community-based solutions to local needs by establishing collaborations with local businesses, civic organizations, private citizens, public schools, and other government entities. The Foundation provided small planning and implementation grants to each college,

but the network of colleges, MDC, community leaders, and Foundation officers collectively shaped the specific intervention strategies of the evolving initiative.

Access and Economic Development

One of the assumptions behind RCCI was that access to higher education and economic development were related. Rural communities had traditionally depended upon agriculture and/or extractive resource-based industries to generate wealth, but the new knowledge-based economy demanded greater access to information and job training. Individuals who lacked education and workplace skills would not get good jobs in the new century. Without good jobs and a strong economy, most high school and college graduates would continue to leave poor communities. By linking the access and economic development agendas, RCCI hoped to reverse this trend and in turn promote stronger economic and community development. Although many community colleges across the United States routinely focus on workforce and economic development partnerships, this was a new idea to some of the RCCI colleges who had traditionally served only as transfer institutions.

Community Colleges as Catalysts

Community colleges were selected to lead rural revitalization in these areas for several reasons. They were stable, community-based institutions widely respected across the community. They had established ties to local governments, businesses, and non-profit organizations. They were flexible institutions with a history of training people for the workplace, and they had faculty and staff with a broad spectrum of expertise. Above all, they were neutral places for building community confidence, trust, and cooperation—qualities that were often weak in distressed rural regions. Rural colleges in the targeted areas had potential for leadership in community development, but many lacked the vision, knowledge, and focus to serve as catalysts for change. RCCI was expected to serve as a vehicle for institutional transformation, energizing the colleges to expand their mission, create new partnerships, and acquire new skills.

Local Decision-Making

Ford believed that this transformation could best be nurtured through a program that emphasized local decision-making by institutions connected through a national

learning network. MDC challenged the colleges to think strategically, learn from each other, and strengthen collaborations with a wide range of local and national institutions. Through a variety of intervention strategies, MDC pressed the colleges to think more creatively, to expand their leadership base, and to develop deeper collaborations across their communities. Most important, the third-party manager helped colleges think about their starting places (where they were as institutions and community leaders), begin documenting their baseline position, move toward transformation, and chart their progress.

Diversity

Different kinds of institutions were reflected in the RCCI experimental model. They were young and old, poor and less poor, struggling and well established. While colleges that were more disadvantaged seemed least capable of leading an access and economic development agenda, their communities were often those of greatest need. In some cases, less disadvantaged colleges could quickly demonstrate "success," but their institutional cultures were more deeply ingrained, less inclusive, and less open to change. RCCI offered a structured environment where all institutions could learn, regardless of their starting points. It became a demonstration of diversity in terms of geography, race, cultures, ethnicity, local economy, institutional governance, and leadership styles. This national diversity would prove to be one of the greatest strengths of the RCCI experiment.

Cause and Effect

Assessing the impact of such a multifaceted and bold initiative is a difficult task. RCCI is not an experimental field test intended to analyze the effect of fertilizer applications. It is a complex, expensive, and very social demonstration project. One cannot expect to find incontrovertible cause-and-effect relationships. Instead, lessons and insights can be derived about a certain kind of philanthropy, third-party management, funding mechanisms, and a holistic approach to community development.

That said, the assessment team's analysis of qualitative and quantitative data indicates that RCCI was highly successful in placing community colleges in poor places on the road to becoming catalysts for change. RCCI played a major role in

enhancing the human capacities of these rural institutions. The collaborative process and MDC's emphasis upon inclusive team building nurtured leadership among faculty and community partners and provided skills and confidence to an emerging tier of secondary and tertiary leaders. This new leadership capacity—critical for sustainable institutional change and community development—was most evident in the roles of faculty team leaders and project coordinators, many of whom assumed new responsibilities on campus and became part of a national learning network. The effect of building college-community teams was also to bring community leadership onto the campus, provide new ideas and perspectives, and challenge old assumptions and practices. A college's ability to move along MDC's "swoosh curve" toward transformation was related to its leadership capacity.

Ability to Benefit

Colleges varied in their ability to benefit from RCCI. Some worked harder at it than others. Although some had successful programs and partnerships, they were less open to change. RCCI offered a structured environment where all institutions could learn, regardless of their starting points. Newer and more severely disadvantaged colleges as well as older and more prosperous colleges participated in the pilot phase. In the end, after several years with RCCI, it could be said that the communities who had the farthest to go were the ones who made the most significant progress toward developing capacity to do the work. They may still be at the low end of the swoosh curve but in relative terms, they moved the farthest toward social change.

Colleges took advantage of the various components of intervention in different ways and some strategies became more important over time as the institutions' capacities to benefit from intervention grew. Many helped create synergy among participating colleges. The national leadership institutes, technical assistance, V-to-A, and staff guidance were critical to institutional learning and transformation, no matter the experience or leadership style of the institution. These activities helped the colleges and community leaders think more strategically about the process of change (in both the institution and the community) than they might have in a purely project-oriented environment. For RCCI, individual campus projects were the means to an end, but the process of getting there provided the energy for change.

External Environment

The demonstration phase of RCCI helped lessen the isolation—geographic and otherwise—of 24 colleges in economically distressed communities in four very different parts of the country. By coupling access to higher education and economic development, RCCI insisted on new ways of thinking. The development of a national learning network reinforced not only the notion that community building has multiple components, but also that every person in a community has a stake in that community. New and strengthened partnerships with K-12 schools and employers became focused pathways to economic vitality in regions that had not seen much of it. RCCI helped these 24 colleges build relationships with peers in other communities, gain expertise in telling their stories and making their cases to policymakers, funders, and others—all while building new futures in their local communities.

RCCI did not strongly affect policy changes that address power imbalances within the communities. Many RCCI access and economic development projects did not challenge the status quo of the dominant decision-making structures. There was neither enough time nor enough push.

RCCI did take small steps in the confidence-building process that would lead to more engaged institutions and more substantive changes in emerging leaders. RCCI accelerated the learning process both in understanding how to implement new projects and in developing new ways to share and lead within and among communities.

In short, the demonstration phase of RCCI provided a framework for these rural communities to move forward. An eagle's eye summary of what RCCI did might look like this:

- RCCI created change:
  - Developed place-based self-confidence
  - Encourage willingness to take risks
  - Provided exposure to new ideas
  - Changed the way community colleges think about their mission
- RCCI built capacity:
  - Changed institutional culture
  - Leveraged resources
  - Developed new leaders
  - Provided professional development

Chapter 12. Recommendations

The seven-year demonstration phase of the Rural Community College Initiative took a lot of time, money, and hard work. The Ford Foundation and MDC dared the 24 colleges to think more broadly and boldy than ever before. The colleges were located in some of the poorest communities in America and faced struggles many Americans would be shocked to learn about. Tribal colleges and universities confront particular challenges borne of decades of broken promises from the federal government. All the colleges learned about themselves and about one another. Some colleges, even rural colleges, in other communities might already be familiar with some of the strategies and implementation techniques that evolved from the RCCI demonstration.

Nevertheless, the lessons of RCCI are applicable in other settings, especially for new and recently appointed community college presidents. Colleges, state and national policymakers, tribal and community leaders, national associations, and potential funders might consider the following observations and recommendations.

- ***Invest in leadership.*** Community college leadership development is a good investment, and the need for new college and community leaders is great. A leadership gap looms larger than at any time in the last 40 years as current leaders at all levels approach retirement. The RCCI approach to building community capacity by nurturing new leadership and leadership styles, using informed strategic planning, and developing teams was an effective one. Investment in professional development for new and emerging leaders at all levels is crucial.

- ***Value place-based commitment.*** RCCI validated the importance of "place" as a factor not to be ignored in development programs that aim to bring more underrepresented people into the higher education pipeline and to contribute to regional economies. "Place" represents more than a geographic setting in rural America; it also represents strong cultural values of family and history, civic engagement, and dedication to a community. Social, political, and financial commitments to rural communities that acknowledge those values can help struggling rural communities build a vital economy and enhance individual opportunities.

- ***Think big about education.*** Make education a priority in community development. Work comprehensively on education in poor communities, beginning with preschool and extending through higher education. Simultaneous investment in P-12 and community colleges in the same community will have a much higher payoff than investing in only one sector. Encourage connections between community colleges and young children to help them—and their parents—understand the value of education. Find ways to ease the transitions from secondary education to higher education, especially for adult learners, first-generation college students in poor and rural communities, and youth without a college vision. Find ways to reach the men and minorities who are missing from higher education institutions. The United States cannot afford to lose a single person's contribution.[30]

- ***Encourage creativity.*** Funders should view flexible seed money as a good investment. Public and private funders who already offer flexibility in grant funding should continue to do so, and those who do not should think about changing their practices. Some of the most promising outcomes were never anticipated at the time of initial funding.

- ***Work to reform state policy and practices.*** Leaders should help policymakers, even in tough economic times, find innovative ways to support rural communities. State policymakers should take another look at how funds are used. For example, state travel restrictions could be lifted when non-state funds are available for educators to attend networking, professional development, and training events in or outside the state. While valuing diversity and community differences, RCCI helped participating colleges see similarities elsewhere that could lead to local solutions. This lesson could be applied to state and regional policymaking. Alliances with new partners could help garner attention and support for education, economic vitality, and community health in rural and inner-city settings. People and institutions usually have more in common than they think.

- ***Take advantage of newly gained expertise.*** RCCI produced a new cadre of people with skills and experience in community development. All the 24 colleges in RCCI's demonstration phase can contribute their experience and passion to the new RCCI network being developed by the regional rural development centers. The value to these colleges of participating in a

[30] See *No One to Waste: A Report to Public Decision Makers and Community College Leaders* by Robert McCabe, American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, D.C., 2001.

national learning community with an emphasis on cross-cultural learning cannot be overstated. Funders, state policymakers, regional development entities, national associations, and other rural colleges should open the door for the RCCI colleges to contribute to subsequent initiatives with community colleges.

- ***Maintain relationships.*** An effective learning network keeps learning. Post-RCCI demonstration phase groups that are committed to rural development should maintain a relationship with the original 24 RCCI colleges. Allowing them the continued prestige of being involved with an important Ford Foundation initiative would come at a low cost but would offer high payoff.

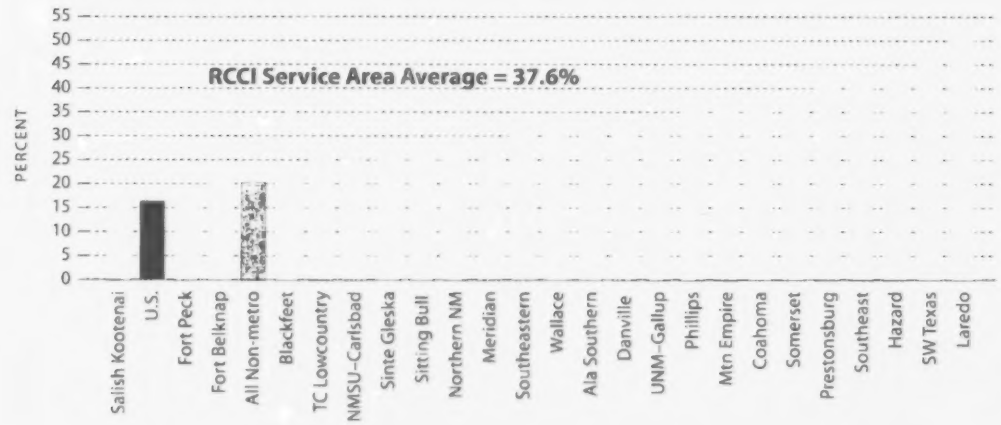
- ***Channel resources effectively.*** Find ways to provide new funding, networking, and learning opportunities to alternative institutions and individuals—those who may have been ignored in the past but have the will and ability to contribute and create positive change. Despite years of attention and some significant success in the RCCI initiative, there is a continued need for investment in these distressed rural communities.

- ***Be realistic.*** Have realistic expectations of colleges that have few financial, physical, and human resources. Do not expect miracles from impoverished institutions, especially if they lack the funds to support intensive coaching and assistance. It is not that they cannot benefit, but they must start with fundamental, college capacity building before they can accomplish effective economic development and access work. Buy-in from the college leadership is more important than the strength of the institution.

- ***Validate early findings.*** The RCCI national assessment resulted in some interesting findings for which further research is needed. Did RCCI have a measurable impact on educational access and local economic development during the demonstration phase, as this assessment suggested? Will the colleges that benefited most from RCCI in the demonstration phase continue to benefit as the initiative moves forward? Will the momentum launched by the RCCI demonstration phase continue? The answers to these questions are critical not only to the success of the next generations of RCCI colleges but also to other community colleges in economically distressed areas.

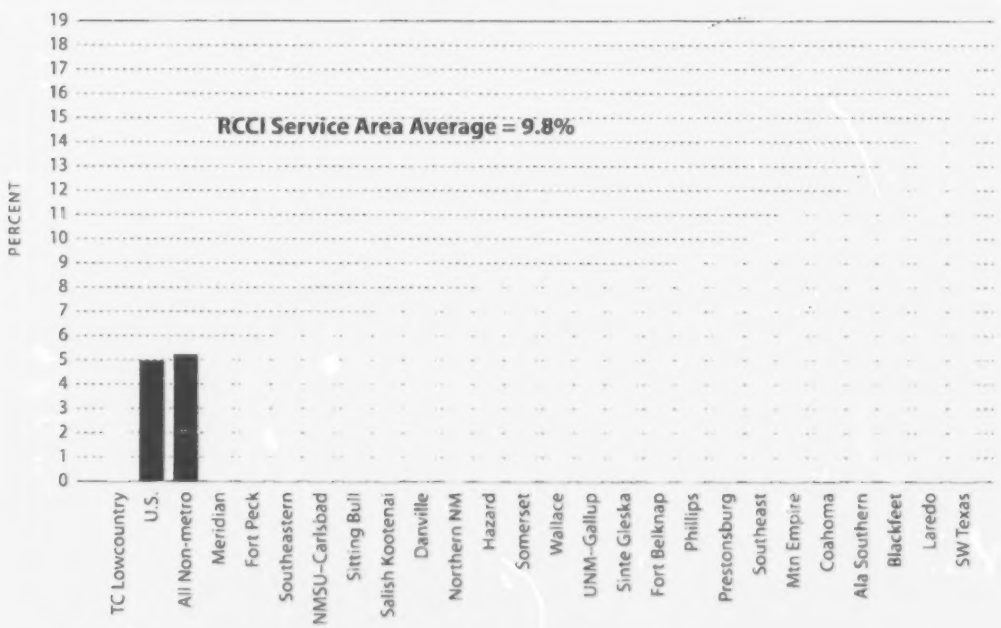
Appendix Figures

Figure A.
Population 25 Years & Over Without A High School Degree, RCCI Service Areas, All Non-Metro Counties, and U.S., 2000



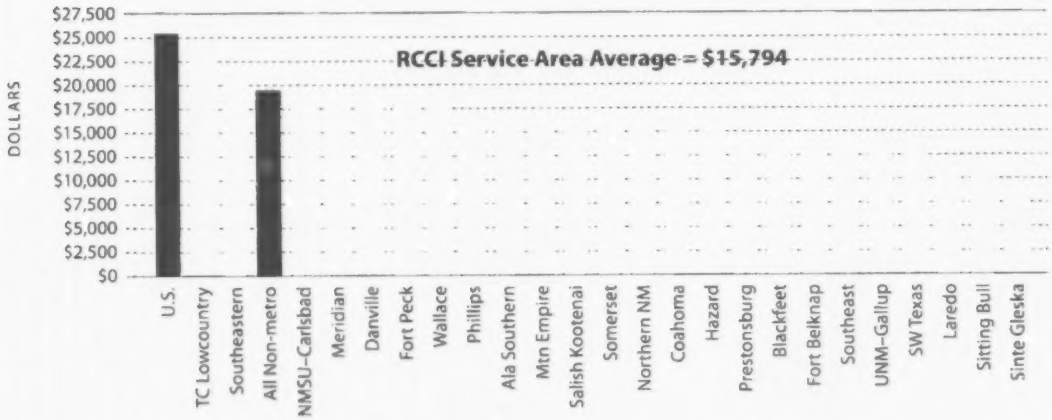
Source: RCCI service areas & U.S. data from 2000 Census of Population, U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov). All nonmetro counties data from ERS, USDA (www.ers.usda.gov), based on Current Population Survey, 1998.

Figure B.
Average Unemployment Rate, RCCI Service Areas, All Non-Metro Counties, and U.S., 1997



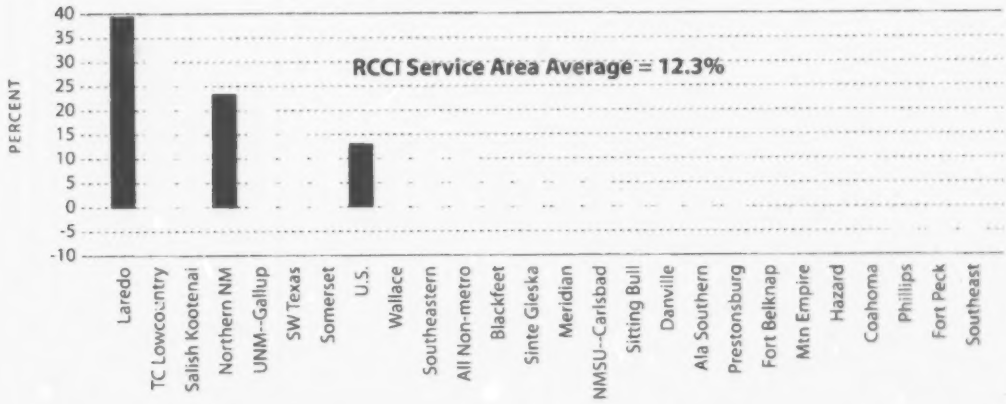
Source: RCCI service area and U.S. data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. All nonmetro counties data from Current Population Survey for 1997, U.S. Bureau of the Census

Figure C.
Per Capita Income, RCCI Service Areas, All Non-Metro Counties, and U.S., 1997



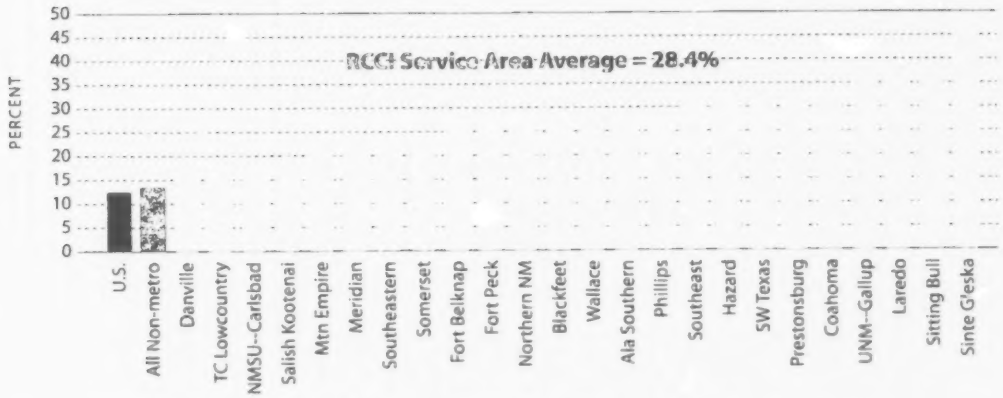
Source: RCCI service areas, all nonmetro counties, and U.S. data are from Bureau of Economic Analysis, Local Area Personal Income (www.bea.gov)

Figure D.
Population Change, RCCI Service Areas, All Non-Metro Counties, and U.S., 1990-2000



Source: RCCI service areas, all nonmetro counties, and U.S. data are from Bureau of Economic Analysis, Local Area Personal Income (www.bea.gov)

Figure E.
Persons with Income Below Poverty Level, RCCI Service Areas, All Non-Metro Counties, and U.S., 1999



Source: RCCI service area and U.S. data from 2000 Census of Population, U.S. Bureau of the Census (www.census.gov).
All nonmetro counties data from U.S. Bureau of the Census, based on Current Population Survey 2000

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Dr. Viterito has been involved in higher education as both an instructor and a researcher since 1979. After several years with the University of Pittsburgh, he joined The George Washington University, where he developed a program in geographic information systems and directed the university's Cartography and Geodetic Sciences program. He has published a number of professional papers in applied geography and geographic research methods. In 1998, he started Viterito Research, a consulting venture that provides GIS support, database platforms, and statistical solutions for commercial clients. While embracing the challenges of private enterprise, he maintained his ties to teaching, holding an appointment as an Adjunct Professor of Geography at Northern Virginia Community College. His work at the American Association of Community College includes tracking population, employment, and enrollment trends.

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